# FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM

## Memories of the Freedom Struggle in Orissa





*Edited by*
Jatindra K. Nayak
Arun K. Mohanty

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# Contents

# Introduction

THIS volume brings together thirty-six excerpts from personal narratives relating to the freedom struggle in Orissa. It is perfectly possible that, given the level of participation in the freedom movement in Orissa, more such narratives are available. However, collecting all these and putting them together would call for a much larger undertaking which is beyond our means.

The period these excepts cover spans roughly twenty-six years: from 1921, when Mahatma Gandhi paid his first visit to Orissa, to 1947, when India attained independence. During this period, largely under Gandhi's charismatic leadership, a large number of people coming from different social and religious backgrounds plunged themselves into the struggle against British rule. Fundamental changes in the outlook of an otherwise pliant population took place. People went to jail, students gave up their studies, and professionals gave up lucrative careers and took part in the national struggle in response to Gandhi's call for non-co-operation. Some went into exile and some went underground. People experimented with different forms of protest. Quite a few made the supreme sacrifice, laying down their lives for their country. In short, ordinary, unremarkable people displayed extraordinary courage and transformed themselves into heroes. Although most of them came under the spell of Gandhi's ideas and personality, some were inspired by other ideologies, especially communism, and offered violent resistance to British rule. Many who lived in feudal states in Orissa found themselves ranged against despotic kings backed by colonial rulers. Their struggle forms a part of the larger narrative of resistance to British rule.

Most of the authors of these personal narratives included in this volume took an active part in the nationalist struggle. However, some were witnesses to the great events unfolding and transforming the social and political landscape during the period. Barring a few, nearly

all of them were born in the first two decades of the twentieth century. They were all young men and women, even children, when the winds of change swept them off their feet. The period of the freedom struggle coincides with their youth and adolescence. Memories of the struggle therefore provide us with glimpses of young men and women growing up in a world being remade by forces of history, a world animated by millennial hopes. These memories derive a strange poignancy from the fact that they are recollected in old age.

The nature of participation in the freedom movement differed from person to person. To some it was a liberating experience, giving them an opportunity to rebuild their lives on radically new principles. To others, it was a destabilizing experience making them face moral and emotional dilemmas, extreme physical hardship, even utter disillusionment. Some emerged as leaders; others simply carried out tasks allotted to them. Some allowed their participation in the freedom struggle to alter the course of their lives completely. Others stayed with it for a while, and then drifted away into obscurity. In each of these personal narratives, therefore, one finds the same events viewed from a shifting, subjective prospective.

The experiences recorded in these narratives revolve around a few familiar themes: encounter with Gandhi; going to jail, which in a caste-ridden orthodox society was a traumatic experience; the emergence of women into the public sphere, and coming face to face with police brutality. However, these experiences are narrated from varying points of view; they elicit different responses from the narrators. Prison, for instance, strikes some as a degrading place; to others, it was a place of learning. In some narratives, the English appear cruel, unfeeling and heartless; in others, they are presented as reasonable, and as full of compassion. Even the police are not always oppressive. They, too, sometimes sympathise with the participants in the freedom struggle and help them. The experiences narrated in the excerpts are sometimes funny, and the attitude of the narrators to these is light-hearted and self-deprecating. Not all the narrators would like to project themselves as heroes. In fact, many of them encounter heroism in others in the course of their participation in the freedom struggle, the capacity for self-sacrifice of ordinary people who stood by them in their hour of need. They celebrate this quiet heroism of ordinary men and women in their accounts of the freedom struggle.

In the final analysis, however, these narratives are acts of memory. In these, participants in and witnesses of the freedom struggle seek to reconstruct the past through a process of recollecting it in the present. What they remember is as important as how they choose to remember it, how their location in the present alters their perception of the past. One wonders if present regrets shape their versions of the past, if they exaggerate their own role and belittle that of others, if they remember the past in order to celebrate it in the context of a drab, monochrome present, or do they recall the past simply to bear witness.

We hope that readers will look for answers to these questions in the personal narratives included here and arrive at a fuller understanding of the past in spite of the evasions and distortions that inevitably accompany all acts of memory, which are, after all, art's alternative to history.

Jatindra K. Nayak
Arun K. Mohanty

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Jatindra K. Nayak
Arun K. Mohanty

# Swaraj Will Certainly Come

**Nilakantha Das**

Translated by Supriya Kar

SIR Ashutosh Mukherji invited me to join Calcutta University as a lecturer in Oriya and comparative philology. I promised to him that I would stay in Calcutta till I make at least one student acquire expertise in this subject. I left Satyabadi for Calcutta on 20th September 1920.

That year, in September, Lalaji had launched Satyagraha in real earnest at Calcutta. One day Gopabandhu babu came to stay in my mess. He was on his way to Patna to attend what was for him the last meeting of the Council. I fanned him while he took his dinner. He said to me, " Now you do whatever you like. I will go it alone and join the civil disobedience movement." He was close to tears when he said this. I said, after a pause, "Why do you say such things? We have been together from the very beginning. Whatever we will do, we will do it together." Needless to describe the powerful emotions which overwhelmed us after this.

By January 1921, the civil disobedience movement had gained momentum under Mahatma's leadership. I cannot describe now the enthusiasm and ecstasy which we had felt at the time. The movement created quite a sensation. Mr. Bhagirathi Mishra, who later became a lawyer in Sambalpur, was then a B.L. student in Calcutta College. The people of Sambalpur sent the following message to him: Come immediately, we will do our bit in the civil disobedience movement.

He asked me to accompany him. I wrote about this to Gopabandhu babu. He came to Calcutta at once and took the two of us by train to Sambalpur. This incident took place on the 6th of January 1921. In the mean time, Gopabandhu had transformed Satyabadi school into a national school after holding a discussion with his colleagues there.

Now let me tell you something about the work we did at Sambalpur. I lived there from January to September in 1921. First of all, I set up a national school, which was modeled on Satyabadi. People

were very enthusiastic over this. The wealthiest man of the locality, advocate Sri Ramanarayan Mishra, M.A.B.L., sent his second son to this school; other eminent persons of the town also followed suit. The school created quite a stir in towns and villages. I vividly remember the huge meeting held in the same year on the eve of 6th April on the riverbed when the decision to launch a strike was taken.

Many eminent persons of the town were present at that meeting and were terribly excited about the strike, and after the meeting, they all went through the town to inform everyone about it . Sri Ananthram Supakar accompanied me and spoke to the people, especially to shopkeepers. 6th April was the day on which the Jallianwala Bagh massacre had taken place. In those days, the period from 6th April to 13th April was celebrated as a national week. On this occasion, Sambalpur witnessed an unprecedented strike. To mark it, I had composed a song, which was sung in the rally to persuade students to leave schools, and lawyers, the courts. I cannot now remember the song in full; I can recall only a few lines:

Swaraj will certainly come, Brothers!
Break the chains of slavery,
Sons of India!
Why disgrace yourself by
Embracing slavery?
Schools, cutcherries and councils are nothing but lies,
Don't let yourself be deceived by these.

When we sang this song, in which Hindi and Oriya were freely mixed, during our precession, high school students trooped out of their schools.

I knew the headmaster, Madhusudan Das who was from Nimapara. I still remember the expression on his face, which combined pity, sympathy and eagerness when the students walked out of the school.

*Atmajeevanee.* Cuttack: Cuttack Students'Store, (New Edition), 1986

# Non Co-operation

**Godabarish Mishra**

Translated by Akhtar Jamal Khan and Zehara Jabeen

SOMETHING as devastating as an earthquake shook India. Singhbhum felt the shock, too. British rule in India had begun a hundred and fifty years ago. But Singhbhum came under British rule in 1859, sixty years after the rest of India came to be subjugated by the British. This is the reason why the roots of British administration had not gone very deep in this area. The tribes of Singhbhum had not fully accepted British authority, and from time to time rose in rebellion against colonial rule. The rising led by Birsa Bhagaban had struck panic in the hearts of the British.

Congress held a conference at Nagpur towards the end of December 1920. It was expected that here Gandhi would get Congress to adopt the path of non-cooperation. Accompanied by a large number of his followers, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das came to oppose Gandhi's move. However, after holding a discussion with Gandhi, he himself accepted Gandhi's position. Congress now set to work to spread the message of non-cooperation throughout the country. Mahatma Gandhi declared that India would achieve independence within a year if the non-cooperation movement was launched. The country was full of excitement. The sky and the earth resounded with slogans hailing Gandhi. Everyone - men, women, children, the old - threw themselves into the non-cooperation movement.

Patna University came to be set up when I applied for affiliating Chakradharpur High School to a University. I was made a member of the University council. The University deputed Whitmore saheb, the inspector of schools, Chotanagpur to inspect the school before taking a decision regarding affiliation. He set off from Ranchi and, after covering seventy-two miles on a bicycle; he had a headache and stopped at the dakbungalow to rest himself. Here he got the letter from me saying that he did not have to bother about inspecting the school. I had also explained why he should not come. The headache

had already put him into a foul mood. My letter made him explode. He thought to himself, "I had mistaken this smooth-faced Godabarish Mishra for a gentleman. I find that he is as dangerous as a lighted torch. I wonder if he would burn this beautiful district down."On this day, Gopabandhu babu was in Chakradharpur. The non-cooperation movement had filled him with great excitement. He kept shouting, "Victory to Mahatma Gandhi" although the slogan coming from him sounded rather odd. He had no doubt at all that independence would be achieved within the space of twelve months. But I did not share his confidence.

When one of my young colleagues expressed skepticism, Gopabandhu said, "You are but a baby. If I press your cheeks, mother's milk will flow out. You think you understand everything and Gandhi has launched this movement only on an impulse. Remember, he is an incarnation of god. Do you think he has taken such a daring step without having received some assurance from Afganisthan, Turkey or Russia?"

He had come to Chakradahrpur to persuade me to wind up the school and join the non-cooperation movement. I told him, "You launch the non-cooperation movement in Orissa but please spare the two schools." Normally, I never argued with him. Nevertheless, I told him that the Oriya movement in Singhbhum would suffer if we adopted the path of non-cooperation. He shared this view and said, "You carry forward the Oriya movement here and run the school with the help of officials. It would not be right to let the Oriya movement suffer. However, the school at Satyabadi will be turned into a national school and the teachers of that school will engage themselves in activities undertaken by Congress." This plan of action did not appeal to me. Working in isolation was not to my liking. So it was decided that Chakradharpur School would also be turned into a national school and I would join the non-cooperation movement.

This course of action was chosen the night before the arrival of Whitmore saheb in Chakradharpur. I sent a telegram to him the next day in the morning. But by the time it reached him he must have travelled ten miles on his bicycle along the Chakradharpur route and earned travelling allowance amounting to ten rupees.

Chakradharpur School was made into a national school. I resigned from the membership of Patna University council. I had also been

appointed assessor of Chainbasa sessions court. I returned the summon after receiving it. In those days Scott saheb was looked upon as a very strict judge in Singhbhum. He was not willing to spare me so easily. He said, "We shall see who is more powerful: the lieutenant governor or Gandhi?

He was determined to make me continue as an assessor and do the job. Some of my friends came and tried to persuade me to attend the court. Now Scott saheb's friends persuaded him not to insist on my attending the court. Scott saheb sent all the correspondences exchanged between him and me to higher authorities and sought permission to compel me to appear at the court. This enraged my Ho friends. They said, "If the saheb forcibly takes you to the court we would accompany you in thousands." However, things did not take an ugly turn. Scott saheb was not given permission to take me to Chainbasa against my wishes. I was told that the Bihar-Orissa Provincial government felt that Scott saheb, not me, was the source of tension in Singhbhum.

Scott saheb got transferred. Another white man replaced him. He was an M.A. from Cambridge University and a calm and quiet man. He was born in India. His father was the director of education of the United Provinces. Twenty years later, he came to hold the reins of administration of Orissa. In 1921 he gave everyone a long rope in Singhbum. That was perhaps a deliberate policy on the part of the British, which consisted in leaving everyone to his own devices for a time and watching closely. If someone roams freely and falls into a pit, the authorities then pounce on him. I did join the non-cooperation movement but I did nothing except managing the national school and organizing meetings in Chakradharpur. Propaganda work of the Congress could not be done with meagre school funds. A Muslim daroga of Chakradharpur gave me twenty five rupees and said, "Go and hold meetings in different places, let the news come out in the papers. Give us an opportunity to send in reports." Then he expressed his contempt for the British government by calling it his wife's brother, and said, "These people are only looting the nation, make them quit India. I salute Gandhi and I salute you." I received a lot of help from the policemen in Chakradharpur. Whenever we asked for contributions to the Tilak Swaraj Fund, at first no hands would be raised although people had money in their pockets. It would be a policeman, who had

gone there to take down the speeches, would be the first person to donate a coin. After this, a shower of coins would follow. It was not that policemen helped only in collecting donations. In those days, most of the policemen in that district happened to be Bengalis. Sometimes I played practical jokes at their expense. I would announce that a meeting would be held at a certain place and then conduct it somewhere else. The police would go there and come away feeling foolish. But I saw they did not take it to their heart and laughed the whole thing off. At times they would collect information about our movements and reach the place where we held our meetings. On such occasions they would ask jokingly, "Who won today? See, we will issue a warrant today." But no warrant would be issued. The year 1921 passed without any warrant issued against us. Ananta Mishra, who was in charge of propaganda work, was caught and jailed for a year. As he was a first-class prisoner he got plenty of good food to eat. Before Mishra got arrested, the deputy commissioner wrote a letter asking me to meet him. He had written, "If you come in a group, meet me at the cutcherry; if you come alone, come and see me at my bungalow." Friends advised me against going to his bungalow alone. They said, "Go to the court accompanied by five thousand people. There you will show him who is the boss of Singhbhum: Godabarish Mishra or Lewis saheb." After a long debate it was decided that I would meet Lewis saheb alone at his bungalow. When I went, some thought that I would not return home and that I would be straight sent to jail.

I called on Lewis saheb. A bundle of the copies of my speeches lay before him. He selected six of these and asked me to go through them. After I had read them he said, "You are a learned man. Does it become you to criticize the British Government in such a harsh way? You desist from this." I found that whatever I spoke at the meetings the reports had been played down. The policemen copying them had left out the more offensive parts of my speech. We talked on a lot of things that day. He talked about the experiences of his college days. He explained how the Indian youth were going astray. At last, he told me, "You will not give such fiery speeches." Twenty years later, during the two years and a half he spent in Orissa, we talked and joked about this meeting a number of times.

*Ardha Satabdira Orissa o Tahinre Mo Sthana*. Cuttack: Grantha Mandir, 1958

## Picketing Foreign Cloth Shops

**Gobinda Chandra Mishra**

Translated by Gopabandhu Patnaik

I did not have the time to realise what an onerous burden I had shouldered when I took upon myself the responsibility to picket shops selling British cloth in Cuttack city. I made my way to the Marwari lane with two volunteers the day after I made this declaration at a public meeting. There used to be a number of shops in the Marwari lane selling cloth imported from England. On arriving there, I realised that it was next to impossible to deal effectively with so many shopkeepers. Out of excessive zeal and excitement, I had made the declaration that I would start picketing these shops. However, when I reached the Marwari lane, courage deserted me. I had taken this decision without taking the Provincial Congress Committee into confidence. Now realisation dawned upon me. If I did not succeed, it was not difficult to imagine what fate awaited me. I had to succeed, if not completely, at least partially and without much loss of time. It became clear to me that if picketing was not done effectively and the shop-keepers continued to trade their foreign goods, it would expose the weakness of the Congress movement in Orissa. I would be the cause of such a debacle in the State. I was certain that the Congress Committee would not forgive me easily for such a lapse. I would be swept away by the collective anger and disappointment of the Congress workers. Would I be able to face and bear such a fate? Such thoughts kept my mind occupied when I started picketing in the Marwari lane with two volunteers that morning.

We started patrolling from 7 A.M to 12 noon and from 3 P.M to midnight from Balu bazar square to Chaudhuri bazar square. If I saw anybody purchasing a foreign cloth, I would persuade him to give it to me. Then we would burn the cloth in the street. We used to burn about a hundred pieces of cloth every day. Such public burning of clothes attracted huge crowds and wherever I went, onlookers

followed me. After a few days, nobody who purchased a foreign cloth could escape our vigil. Before I could go to explain our purpose to the hapless purchaser, I found that people from the crowd would surround and taunt him. The fellow did not know what to do other than throw the cloth he had just purchased and find an escape route. If somebody was adamant about keeping it, I gave him the price of the cloth and took it from him and threw it into the fire. This would force him to purchase a hand-spun cloth.

After a week or so of trying this novel method of picketing, no gentleman dared to come to the Marwari lane to purchase foreign cloth. But it did not stop the trade completely. In the mean time, the police sahib had called me to the police station and issued me with a stern warning to desist from such unlawful activity in the bazar. I returned to the Marwari lane after telling him, "I was only doing my duty. I was not creating any fracas in the bazar." I started my picketing with my two volunteers immediately after I returned from the police station.

During our patrolling, I would go to every Marwari shop to assess the attitude of the shopkeeper. Some of these Marwari brothers would start abusing me the moment they found me before their shops. Such abuse became my armour. They would abuse me in filthy language and I would calmly ask them to stop selling foreign cloth. Such a spectacle would attract a few hundred onlookers who would crowd the street. The entire crowd became my volunteers. They would follow me whereever I went. I would continue patrolling from Balu bazar, to Choudhury bazar and before every shop people would gather and prevent anybody from purchasing any foreign cloth. This is how picketing took place throughout Marwari lane.

There used to be an old Marwari called Ichha Ram, a really irritable person. The moment he would see me from a distance, he would get angry and start abusing me. We started picketing his shop. He did not tolerate our antics for long and lodged an F.I.R. at the police station. Dewan Bahadur Shrikrushna Mohapatra, the officer-in-charge at the police station, was on the lookout for just such an opportunity. As long as nobody complained, he was not in a position to stop us. After Ichha Ram lodged the FIR, he swung into action. When he arrived at Marwari lane, the picketing was at its peak. There were a few hundred

persons. He came to me and said, "Well, Mr. Mishra, you must remember that your Swaraj has not yet been established." I retorted, "Well, you must remember that we are fighting to establish our Swaraj." He did not lose any time, and after arresting me he ordered the constables to take me to the police station. He went ahead, and the police marched me towards the police station. Hundreds of people followed us there and started a bonfire of foreign clothes in front of it. My arrest created a stir throughout Cuttack city. I was put in the police lock-up. Around 7 P.M, Mr Mohapatra came to the police station and I was brought before him. He asked me to give an undertaking to the effect that I not would indulge in any such activity in future. I told him that I had not done anything wrong and do not intend to change my ways. I was only doing my duty and after I was released I would go back to the market to resume what I was doing before. Mr Mohapatra turned red with anger. "Your name," he thundered, "figured during the Daspalla uprising, and a warrant was issued against you. But I was kind enough not to arrest you because you were a student at that time. But I never realized that you are a poisonous snake, a cobra."

"You made a great mistake at that time by letting me off," I said. "Now that you have come to know me well, you should not commit the same mistake again." Mr Mohapatra was beside himself with anger. He did not say anything, and ordered the constables to throw me into the lock-up. I was produced before the magistrate the next day and sent to the jail. After 3 to 4 days, the trial started. Mr Thadani, who was posted as Magistrate in Puri, was officiating as S.D.O. at Cuttack at that time. I was produced in his court. Police has chargesheeted me under section 1 to 5 of the I.P.C, but they failed to produce any evidence. Mr Thadani acquitted me of all the charges, declaring me innocent. I was taken to a public meeting from the court, and I addressed the crowd, informing them of my release.

In the mean time, another development had taken place. All the Marwari businessmen of Cuttack dealing in foreign cloth had given an undertaking to the Congress that they would not import any foreign clothes until 31st December 1928. Though the Marwari businessmen gave such an undertaking, some of them continued to buy foreign clothes from the black market in Calcutta. We felt that, unless we succeeded in stopping the blackmarketing, all our efforts would be

futile. So a committee was formed. Besides Congress workers, a few Marwari businessmen were also taken as members. The committee discussed the issue of black marketing and decided to impose fines on those who indulged in it. It was decided that besides being fined, the culprit would have to confess his crime publicly. If any black marketeer did not agree to confess, his shop would be picketed. Once one Marwari was fined five hundred rupees when it was discovered that he had ordered some material from Calcutta. He came to Swaraj Ashram, the Congress headquarters, a number of times requesting us to exempt him from the fine. He pestered me whereever I went. I also felt a bit moved after listening to his story. He was an important businessman of Cuttack. But this was his third offence, so the committee was adamant not to change its decision. When this was discussed in the committee, other Marwaris objected to any show of leniency. Hence the fine could not be reduced and picketing his shop continued. Ultimately, the Marwari cocerned had to deposit the fine. This incident put the fear of God into the hearts of other recalcitrant businessmen. They realised that Congress meant business. Slowly the truth dawned upon them that the British government could not protect them from the scourge called 'picketing'. After this incident, whenever one came across a Marwari on the street, he would hasten to add, "Sir, Swaraj will come. It will definitely come." This is how picketing started and succeeded in Cuttack. Puri and Balasore also followed suit, and people started picketing before foreign cloth shops there. The Provincial Congress Committee by its silence put its seal of approval on such activities in the province.

"Bilati Luga Dokanare Picketing" in *Jatiya Jibanara Atmabikash* (Part II) Champapur: Gobinda Chandra Mishra, 1940.

# The Dilemma of a Freedom Fighter

**Nanda Kishore Das**

Translated by Supriya Kar

THE beginning of my married life and my political life was marked by ~~of~~ worries, pain, suffering and misfortune. I had come home on leave for fifteen days, but conditions at home did not allow me to return after the expiry of the period of my leave. Shortly after my wedding ceremony was over, relatives who had come to attend it took leave of us. Where would the money to meet daily household expenses come from? I had no one — father, uncle, or an elder brother — who could look after the household affairs. Mother was completely penniless. During my student days she could somehow manage to get by. After my studies were over, I would land a well-paid job, earn a lot, and her life-long suffering would come to an end— when these hopes got shattered, her patience ran out and she could no longer suppress her feelings of anger and frustration. The ornaments, the dowry that her son had brought in failed to calm her. Her anger was focused on my bride and me. Such an unfortunate turn of events left me numb. What would I do to meet the day-to-day expenses?

I got news from various sources about the progress of the Congress-led movement. I felt I was shying away from my duties by sitting at home and distancing myself from the movement. Around this time I got a long letter from Pandit Gopabandhu Das, founder of Congress movement in Orissa. He had written, "O newly wed young man, you forget old faces having seen a new one." I felt dejected when I read this. Whatever ill fortune may befall me, I now decided not to sit idle at home.

This period in my life coincided with Mahatma Gandhi's first visit to Orissa. I reached Bhadrak the day he arrived there. There I saw Mahatma Gandhi. I also met Pandit Gopabandhu and other people who had joined Congress. I learnt from the speech Gandhiji delivered

the essentials of non-violent civil disobedience and how to put these into practice. Gandhiji set off for Andhra Pradesh from Orissa, to attend the first conference of All India Congress Committee at Vijaywada. At this , the Congress passed a resolution to the effect that states would be formed on the basis of language. Each state committee took the responsibility of steering the movement. State Committee formed District level Congress Committees. In addition, the proposals to enrol one million Congress workers, to collect a sum of one million rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund and to put into operation one lakh charkhas, were accepted. After this, Congress set to work in earnest not only in some particular states, but all over the country. The Congress message spread from towns to villages. In comparison to other states, the movement had greater intensity in Orissa.

I became a member of Utkal State Congress Committee, and in its Working Committee. I also associated myself with the Balasore District Committee. The organization at Balasore district functioned very effectively under the dynamic leadership of Mr. Harekrushna Mahatab. Responding to his appeal, school and college students, young men and women plunged themselves into the movement. The excitement felt in Balasore district seemed to have surpassed that seen in all other parts of Orissa. I felt like letting myself be swept by this current of excitement. But my guilty conscience pricked me , for I failed to give myself completely to it. I could never express this dilemma before anyone. Even if I had, who would really have bothered? Other comrades who had joined the movement either had no financial problems at home or they had no family responsibilities to shoulder. A complex circumstance handicapped me. I was plagued by the poverty of my family and by the fact that supporting it was entirely my responsibility. Again, my mother's relentless hostility towards my wife kept worrying me. My mother had thought that my wife would nag me into settling problems at home, and compel me to leave Congress and devote myself to earning money. But my wife did nothing of that sort. She quietly bore the pangs of poverty, but never dissuaded me from joining the civil disobedience movement. I had to negotiate such a complex state of affairs before I could start my life as a dedicated party worker.

At that time, a scheme was introduced for the benefit of poor political workers and lawyers who had renounced their professions. This fund was set up with a donation from Jamunalal Bajaj. I was one of its beneficiaries in Orissa and I received a sum of nearly four to five hundred rupees, at thirty rupees per month. This scheme brought me quite a lot of relief and I was able to devote myself to spreading the Congress message. The scope of the movement grew wider. Boycotting the legislative council, abstaining from alcohol, give up wearing foreign clothes- -all these activities gathered momentum. Leaving government jobs and schools and colleges had already become widespread. Added to these, the three activities just mentioned made up a fivefold boycott scheme, which became the foremost Congress programme of action. At places, foreign clothes were stacked up and set on fire. The programme also included protesting against granting license to traders of opium, cannabis and other intoxicating stuff. It was our main task to inform people about these activities of Congress and to persuade people to to enroll themselves as its members. Hence, we were required to go to villages far and near. I covered most of the villages that came under the Soro Police Station. I would put in plain words the activities of Congress before children and adults alike. They displayed unprecedented enthusiasm and interest, which filled me with great satisfaction. I had to contend with two peculiar attitudes – my own sense of satisfaction with my work and the pity of old fashioned elderly people belonging to areas nearby. They wondered why a boy from a poor family, after completing his higher studies, had not taken up any job, but joined the movement against the government, why I was ruining my life going to prison and putting up with fines and other such dangers. They never expected all these from me. This kind of opinion from elderly persons and their pity disturbed my mother's troubled mind all the more. A life of suffering and poverty had taken its toll on my mother and she raised hell at home every day.

My campaigns made me travel extensively. I had to arrange enough money to meet the household expenses for a few days before I would set out. Nevertheless, I had to come home now and then. The moment I set foot in the house, my mother's terrible and restless spirit would grow worse. I would find myself in an impossible situation, which

would try all my patience. it would have been better if I had remained absent from home for long durations in order to avoid such situations, but I had no option but to come home to discharge my duties. My visits brought my wife, who constantly bore with my mother's hostility and abuses, a little solace, however briefly. My condition would have become unbearable if my wife had added to all this an iota of resentment. However, by the blessings of God, she never nagged me and always encouraged me to serve people.

*Mo Jeevan Janjala Kahani*, Cuttack; Gopabandhu Sahitya Mandir, 1981

# The Salt Satyagraha

**Ramadevi Choudhuri**
Translated by Manmohan Choudhuri

IT was January 1930. Efforts were being made to get the resolution on complete independence adopted by the Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress to be taken on a pledge by the people of India on as large a scale as possible. Public meetings were to be held in as many places as possible attended by large numbers of people. The resolution was to be read out to them phrase by phrase and the audience was to repeat the same in unison. January 26 had been fixed for the function. A ceremonial hoisting of the national flag was to be carried out in the morning and the public meeting was to be held at five in the evening. That was the programme for the day as fixed for the town of Cuttack. The authorities had in the meantime banned all meetings and demonstrations at public places by promulgating an order under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Gandhiji had issued strict instructions that there was to be no civil disobedience till he gave the order. So the flag hoisting ceremony was held at a private place. It had been announced that the public meeting would be held at the Town Hall and permission for the same had been requested. But this permission was not granted. So it was decided to hold the meeting in the compound of our house. The news that the Government has not allowed the public meeting in the Town Hall had spread like wild fire throughout the town and it infused more interest and enthusiasm in the people. The attendance at the meeting was beyond expectation. Since there was not enough place in our compound, poeple got on the roof, sat on the compound wall and on the high bank of the river that is near our house. There were no loudspeakers in those days, yet the vast gathering took the pledge in an orderly manner. The acceptance of the resolution as a pledge by large masses of the people electrified the atmosphere. After this we went away to Alakashram so as to be there when the movement began.

At that time the only newspaper published from Cuttack was the weekly Samaj. Hence, we could not get prompt information about day-to-day developments at Cuttack and elsewhere. Our principal task was to enroll as many persons as possible from the surrounding villages as members of the Congress. Pandit Prankrushna Padhiery, now no more, was our chief helper in this work. The members had to pay an annual fee of four annas. Frequent circulars came from the All India Congress Committee containing information about the latest developments and instructions for the volunteers. This helped to stoke the enthusiasm of the people. Inchuri Chatan, a place on the sea coast in the district of Balasore, some one hundred and twenty five miles from Cuttack was selected as the venue for the breaking of the Salt Act in Orissa. The Satyagrahis were to march all the way from Cuttack to that place. The stages on the route had been chosen and appropriate programmes of public meetings and demonstrations had been drawn up for each such halting place. Public meetings and demonstrations were taking place almost every day at Cuttack.

April 6, the day fixed for the start of the march by the first batch of Satyagrahis, drew near. My husband, our children and I came down to Cuttack on the 4th. The excitement and thrill were mounting day by day. The first batch started out from Cuttack in the early morning of the appointed day. They carried their spare clothing, reed mats for bed and other things themselves, tied in rolls and slung from their shoulders.

There were twenty Satyagrahis in this first batch and my husband, Gopabandhu Choudhuri, led them. Acharyya Harihar Das was his second-in-command. Gourangacharan Das, Raghunath Das, Sudarshan Praharaj and Vinod Choudhuri from Cuttack, Bishwanath Hota and Golok De from Balasore, Raghunath Mishra from Puri and Dayananda Satpathy from Sambalpur were in this batch. Gopababu was arrested on the way because he had broken the ban in Cuttack on meetings by addressing one. The rest of the Satyagrahis continued their March, but after a few days they took a train to Balasore so as to be able to offer civil disobedience on April 13, which they did.

What should I do now ? Was the question that was uppermost in my mind after the Satyagrahis had left. What could I do ? I made the speech by Gandhiji that I had heard at Binod Bihar, Cuttack, in 1921

my pole star. I made up my mind to go out and join the movement with the faith that forms of action would emerge by themselves if I followed the advice that had been given in that speech. Civil disobedience by breaking the Salt Act was offered at Inchuri Chatan under the leadership of Acharyya Harihar Das. The police indulged in repressive acts like arrests, lathi charges, seizure of the illegally manufactured salt, breaking of the utensils used to manufacture it and so on. A group of women including Kiranbala Sen, Malatidevi and myself went to Inchuri Chatan from Cuttack to see the action. We reached Balasore in the evening, stayed at the Satyagraha Camp located in an old building that had housed an office of the East India Company, locally known as the Permit Kothi, and went to Inchuri the next morning in a motor car. The car could not go upto the place of satyagrha and so we had to walk some distance. It was summer and around eleven O'Clock in the morning. Some of us were thirsty and wanted water to drink. In those days their were practically no wells in most parts of the Balasore district and tube-wells were unknown. People used the water from ponds and tanks for drinking also. So we went to a tank to have a drink. The water near the bank was muddy, so we thought that we would get clear water if we went a little inside the tank and waded in. But our footsteps disturbed the sludge at the bottom and the water become as muddy as it was nearer the bank. Ultimately we had to drink the muddy water. I realized for the first time that day the kind of water scarcity that vast numbers of the people in our country had to put up with.

At midday we took rest at the Inchuri Satyagraha camp and went to the Shrijang village that was nearby in the afternoon. We went from door to door in that village and told the women that a number of us women were going to break the salt law that day and appealed to them to join us. The women of the village responded. About fifteen hundred women came out and went with as to collect salt impregnated mud from the sea shore from which salt was to be extracted by a simple indigenous process. All of us gathered some of the mud but the police were nowhere to be seen. We were told that the police have been instructed not to interfere with whatever the women did. This indifference of the police irked us. We gave a talk to the women of Shrijang about the larger aspects of the movement and returned to

Balasore in the evening. I went to stay at Alakashram again after my return to Cuttack. At that time Bhagubabu (the late Bhagirathi Mohapatra) was staying in his village Chatra. I was obsessed with the idea of breaking the salt law. I came to know that discussions had been going on about the choice of a suitable area for breaking the salt law in the Cuttack district and also that Kujang has been selected for the purpose. So after consultation with Bhagubabu and Narayan Birabara Samanta I proceeded to Kujang. I took Prafulla Kumari, wife of Bishwanath Hota, with me. Malatidevi had already reached there with Dr. Brajanath Mishra. Some members of the Vanar Sena (the Monkey Army, a reference to the army of monkeys that is said to have helped Rama in his fight against the demon king Ravana. In the present context, used in reference to the teenagers who had joined the movement) were already there. Satyagraha was being offered during daylight hours. In the evening we would sit down to make plans for the next day. One day it was decided that we, the organizers, should also offer satyagraha after having announced the times and places in advance. Malatidevi, Brajababu and Samanta all chose sites for themselves. It was decided that I should offer satyagraha at a place called Kaliapata.

I was told by Samanta that the Rani of Paradip was favourable to the movement. We were staying at a Math (monastery) near the village Chatua. It was known as Beri Math. I went to meet the Rani accompanied by an adult Satyagrahi and a Vanar Sainik. The Rani welcomed us with open arms. She was the maternal grandmother of Ratnamali Jena, the wife of Samanta. The Rani agreed readily to join the Satyagraha at Kaliapat. She also suggested that meetings of the women in the villages be also held and those who agreed to do so could go to Kaliapat with us.

In the meantime, Sri Madhavananda Mishra, the magistrate entrusted with the task of preventing Satyagraha in the Kujang area, came to know that I had come to Paradip and ordered the ferrymen not to take us in their boats. Rivers and creeks crisscross the area and it is almost impossible to move about without using boats. The news of the magistrate's order spread like wild fire. We had planned to take a boat from Paradip, start in the night and reach Kaliapat early in the morning. The Rani would not have been able to walk all the way to

that place. She had men in her service who could row a boat. It was only necessary to procure one. Her men were able to get a small boat by nightfall. At about eleven in the night some men went to see and found that the magistrate and his entourage were all fast asleep. We started on our journey. We carried only one kerosene lantern with us that was turned down very low so that no light would be visible from the banks. As far as I remember, it was the eighth day after the new moon. The moon rose shortly after we had started. The boat glided silently onward in the moonlight.

Next Morning, the people of Kaliapat were amazed to see the Rani in the person in their village. The Rani appealed to the women to come with us with baskets to breaking the salt law by collecting the salty soil. She explained in brief the why and how of the movement to the assembled men and women. Of course, the people had already formed an idea about it because they had been witnessing the daily satyagraha and the police repression. They had been that one who took up just a handful of the salty soil was sure to get a good beating from the police. At the Rani's appeal the women came out with baskets. There were only women, no men. Kaliapat is a very large village and so the congregation consisting of one or two women from each household was a big one. Some children also tagged along. We went to Gandakipur under the leadership of the Rani. A posse of policemen was present there. All of us including the children collected the soil. The police just stood there passively like spectators. The people did not like this passivity of the police. They wanted the police to interfere and thus taste some action. The salt satyagraha had to stop when the rainy season set in.

In the meantime, some disturbances had taken place in the village Shrijang and the Government had imposed a punitive tax on it. One night a police van loaded with policemen and accompanied by a magistrate had reached the village. The people had panicked and sent away the women and children from the village. The police began collecting the punitive tax forcibly and also indulged in other excesses. When the news of this incident reached Cuttack an effort was made to induce some prominent citizens to go there and gather a first hand account to be published in the papers. Lakshminarayan Sahu, now demised, went there as soon as he was told about it and gave a detailed

account of the incident on coming back. No one else went. Malatidevi, Surendranath Pattnaik and I went to Balasore, consulted Mukunda Prasad Das and proceeded to Khantapara by a morning train. We started walking towards the village Shrijang from the railway station. The village was eight miles from the station. It was the rainy season, the fields were under water. There was no regular road to the village. So we had to walk on the narrow earthen ridges that formed the boundary between plots of land. At some places the ridges were also under water and howsoever carefully might we walk, we slipped very often and we fell into the water. Surendra was carrying some snacks fell in the water and began to float away. Since we had no prospect of having anything else to eat that day, we wadded into the waist deep water and picked up the stuff. We came to a tank on the way and sat down on its embankment to eat the meagre fare. We were all soaked to the skin. Malatidevi remarked while having the snacks that this so woefully little, some puffed rice would be nice as a supplement to it. But where were we to get that ? While looking around we spotted a gentleman little way off coming towards us. We became a little bit hopeful. He came and stood befor us and asked, "What are you doing here in these wet clothes ? Where are you coming from ? Where are you going ?" As he saw that we were being unable to recognize him he said, "Are you not being able to recognize me ? I am Shridhar Panigrahi, brother of Karunakar". When Malatidevi told him that we would be happy to have some puffed rice, he invited us to his house in a tone as if we had honoured him by making the request. There he served us puffed rice. Malatidevi asked for some salt and tamarind to go with it. Shridharbabu served as this simple fare with great affection and regard. He gave us directions for Shrijang and also provided a guide who accompanied us part of the way.

We were surprised to see the situation in Shrijang when we arrived there. There was not a single male person to be seen in the village. There was no question of our staying there for the night because we were all in wet clothes. So we divided into parties and went from house to house to have a look at their insides. Malativedi found five or six woman huddled in a house and ran out and took me there to show me as if it was a strange sight. I had never been so deeply disturbed in my life as I became that day on seeing the ravaged village,

the condition of the houses and the women stricken dumb by terror. I cannot even now bring myself to describe the scene.

The three of us came to the Bahanaga Bazar railway station after collecting all the information we needed to write a report. It was late in the evening when we reached Bahanaga Bazar. We had been on our feet all the time since we got down from the train at Khantapara at seven in the morning and reached Bahanaga Bazar at eight in the evening. The only time that we had sat down for some time was at the house of Shridhar Panigrahi where we had eaten puffed rice. That was also the only meal we had in the whole day. The train we were to take to Cuttack was due to arrive quite some time later. We were all dead tired. We were thinking of where to get something to eat when a Congress worker appeared on the scene. He knew the station master very well. He took me to the latter's quarter and after introducing me to him he told him everything about us. The station master said that he would have been glad to have as us his guests and serve us food, but he dared not do so because of the police. Though he said this outwardly his mind did not seem to have been reconciled to this. He placed some raw rice and vegetables before me and said, "I am going away for the while. Please cook and eat this by the time the train comes". I boiled the rice and made a thin soup with the sour fruit known as Chalta or wau. We had our fill and came to Cuttack by the night train. Salt Satyagraha had to be discontinued because of the onset of the rainy season, so we were assigned different tasks. I was sent to Jajpur to organize public meetings, collect funds and enroll volunteers. I was to proceed to the town of Jajpur and then go into the rural areas from there. I reached the Jajpur Road railway station by train accompanied by a male worker. We got into the bus that was to go to the town. The bus started and then suddenly came to a halt after a short while. There was a commotion among the passengers. Almost immediately a sub-inspector of police accompanied by a constable came to us and told me very politely that I would not be allowed to go to Jajpur by this bus. That was the order issued by the Sub-Dividional Officer of Jajpur. I saw that this aroused sympathy for us in the passengers. A few of them started arguing loudly. But I got down from the bus with my companion. Some of the people there suggested that we go by a bullock cart. But I decided to walk the eighteen miles. It was rather late in the night when we reached Jajpur.

I had been instructed at Cuttack to meet Birupaksha Kar, a lawyer at Jajpur. He was to make arrangements for my stay there. I met Birupakshyababu accordingly and he arranged for me to stay with Jagmohan Tiwari another lawyer. A tour programme was drawn up in consultation with the local Congress workers and we visited a number of places according to it. I went to the villages around the town and held small meetings of both men and womenfolk.

At that time the people were just sold on the Congress. They were also intrigued by the sight of a woman going about in the open addressing meetings and collecting funds. It was possible to organize meetings of women in the villages with very little effort. The women almost buried us under their questions. What did the Congress want them to do? What would be the good of doing those things? How did you come out of your home? How do you maintain yourself while spending your time going about like this? What would be the final outcome of the Congress movement? in what ways would the poor and illiterate people be benefited by it? What good would it do to the women? How would this country be run when this Government went away? Would it mean that there would be no police and no courts? How would then it be possible to keep the wicked under control? The attendance at the meetings used to be small, but it took quite sometime to answer all the questions in detail. I was glad that I had the opportunity to answer all these questions. On occasions when there would be men Congress workers belonging to the same village in the meeting they would try to clamp down on the questioning. "How much understanding do you have that you are asking so many questions?" They would say impatiently, "Just try to remember what she has already told you and to act accordingly. She is a busy person and has many things to do. Why are you wasting her time?" I would take the side of the women and rebut, "If they are not to questions and try to find out what they want to know, then why was the meeting organized at all? I shall answer their questions, however much time it may take."

Sometimes I was just crushed by the welcome the women gave me. At one place they brought milk when asked for a drink of water. I had to explain patiently the effects of drinking milk when one's body needed plain water. A thousands times of the affection, regard

and care due to a person like me was showered on me. But few women came out to join the movement in 1930. A large number came out in 1932 and filled the jails.

A programme was drawn up for my visit to the village Bari. I went to Guhali, thirteen miles from Jajpur, in a bullock cart. There I spent some time with Mrs. Reba Ray, who was staying in that village and started out for Bari. Though I had become accustomed to walking long distances I had little experience of travelling in small and shaky country boats. The flooded rivers between Guhali and Bari had overflown their banks and the whole area, almost upto Bari, a stretch about five miles across was under water. The boat was quite small and there was a strong wind. The waves were as high as the sides of the boat. Though I tried not to show that I was afraid, the Congress workers accompanying me continually assured me that there was no cause for fear since the boatmen was a very experienced navigator. But I sat in the boat holding on tightly to the sides of the boat and with my eyes tightly shut. Any how is reached Bari safely.

When I went to the public meeting in the evening I found that the attendance was very large. It was a regular mass meeting. Quite a large number of women were also there and so there was no need to hold a separate meeting for them. When preparations were being made for holding a session of the Indian National Congress at Puri in 1931 and volunteers were being trained for the occasion, a large number of women and unmarried girls enrolled themselves as volunteers and were trained in camps for women. Many of them were jailed when the movement was resumed in 1932. The Congress workers in that area had cut down innumerable date palm trees in an attempt to stop the manufacture of intoxicating liquor from their sap. This was in pursuance of the programme of prohibition, a plank of the freedom movement. From Bari, I went to other villages including Kalyanpur, Purushottampur and Ahiyas. A large number of women and girls from these villages also later came forward to join the Congress volunteers training camps and many went to jail. After addressing meetings in several villages and collecting some funds, I came back to Jajpur and travelled to the railway station in a bullock cart. This time also I was not allowed to travel in a bus.

After about a couple of decades when I was active in the Land-gift Movement initiated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave, I went one day to

the gentleman who was the Sub-Divisional Officer of Jajpur in 1930 to request him to make a gift of some of his land. It seemed to me that he was feeling embarassed and abashed in my presence because of the actions he had taken against me when he was in service. So I told him, "You did your duty as a government servant at that time. Now it is your duty to share a part of your land with the landless. Please do that duty." He took it in good spirit and made a land-gift.

Excerpt from *Into the Sun: An Autobiography.* Translated from the Oriya original *Jeeban Pathe* (Cuttack : Grantha Mandir, 1984) by Manmohan Choudhuri. New Delhi: National Gandhi Museum, 1998.

# 1930–31

**Harekrushna Mahtab**

Translated by J.N. Patnaik

BY March 1930, it was evident that Mahatma Gandhi's Swaraj Movement would centre on the demand for free manufacture of salt. That year, I was elected President of the Utkal Provincial Congress Committee in absentia. Though I accepted the post, my major concern was the Salt Movement. As President of the Provincial Congress Committee, I had to do certain things that led to a lot of controversies and conflicts. The Congress party decided that all members of the Legislative Assembly must resign. Accordingly, Pandit Nilakantha also resigned. But he again contested as an independent candidate and expected that I as well as the Provincial Congress Committee would support him. This was of course not possible on my part and I told him so. But he was so averse to the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that he was in no mood to heed our request. He tried to persuade the Congress workers of all districts to support him in the election.

A fake leaflet was circulated declaring my support to him. I protested against this and tried to dissuade Congress workers from supporting him. Nilakantha babu insisted that Congress could keep up its apparent show of principles but should help him secretly. I thought this would be very unfair and so tried my best to guide Congress workers in the right direction. But a few Congress workers were swayed by his persuasion. So there began a conflict between us. All of us were so deeply involved in the Satyagraha that this seemed very trivial.

I did not have enough workers with me. For some years past, I had been inviting the Matriculation examinees to a reception every year. I used to discuss various national issues with these young people and inspire them to work for the nationalist cause. That was the time when there were widespread youth movements everywhere including Orissa. At Cuttack, an office for the youth had been opened and a

weekly magazine called *Yubaka* was being published. In Balasore, there was also an office of the young people and a small library. I had persuaded the Matriculation examinees, whom I had invited in 1930, to join the Salt Movement. I had done this before Gandhiji had actually given a call for launching Salt Satyagraha. Twelve of the examinees decided to join the movement. I engaged them in clearing the ponds, distributing medicines etc. in the Inchudi–Srijang area. Surendra and I toured the area and organised meetings. In these meetings, I never talked politics. To dedicate one's life to providing food to the poor is the highest form of service. This was the gist of my lectures everywhere. No one was aware that Surendra, I and a few students were engaged in this kind of work.

I wanted to create the right atmosphere for the Movement. At this time, when Mahatma Gandhi announced the Salt Satyagraha movement, I was overwhelmed with joy. I left for Cuttack and a meeting of the Provincial Congress Committee was convened in the residence of Gopabandhu Choudhuri. At that time, Gopa babu, Pandit Pranakrishna Padhiary and Nabakrushna Choudhuri were sceptical about the success of the movement in Orissa and were contemplating joining Gandhiji in Gujarat. Of course, Padhiary did not agree with them. I assured them that there were bright chances of the movement's success in Balasore. So it was decided by the Provincial Congress Committee to launch the Salt Satyagraha inBalasore under the leadership of Gopabandhu Choudhuri, and we began all arrangements with great zeal. We prepared the ground in such a way that no police or government official would be able to get wind of our strategy. Around the same time, Gandhiji too began his Dandi March in Gujarat. Gopabandhu Choudhuri began his march on foot from Cuttack to Inchudi. But since there was no possibility of his reaching Inchudi on the day fixed by Gandhiji, it was Acharya Harihar who led the manufacture of salt on the Inchudi coast and got arrested. The enthusiasm displayed by the public at that time cannot be described in words. Inchudi is about twelve miles away from Balasore. Acharya Harihar and his followers had begun the Salt Satyagraha in the presence of a cheering crowd of thousands of men, women and young boys. The presence of the police was completely ignored. Such a tremendous success was beyond everybody's imagination. In the mean

time, I and a few other workers set up a Satyagraha camp at Balasore. Initially, there were no plans to collect donations. But under the supervision of Dr. Krushna Prasad Mohanty, a sum of sixty rupees was raised to meet daily expenses, which included publication of a newspaper, the *Prajatantra.* This occasion in fact made it possible for the Prajatantra to become a daily newspaper. Exciting news about the Satyagraha used to be published every day in this paper. Sri Upendranath Panda was the then editor and manager of the Prajatantra. His assistant, Sri Biswanath Hota, had already joined the camp to participate in the Satyagraha. The *Prajatantra* sold like hot cakes. Groups of people from every corner of Orissa reached the Balsore camp and proceeded to Inchudi. Everyone felt overwhelmed by the show of unity and zeal among the local people, thousands of people participated in this salt manufacture expedition and got beaten by the police. According to an official report, Inchudi Satyagraha was only second to the one in Gujarat where Gandhiji had led the Satyagraha. My colleague Sri Surendranath Das had displayed so much dedication during the Inchudi Satyagraha that he was honoured with the title of 'Sardar' and Sardar Surendra became a household name. Those were the days when the Choukidari tax was scrapped and when more police forces were deployed on the plea that policemen were beaten up, which led to police atrocities in Srijang. Important events such as the Salt manufacture along the entire sea-coast of Balasore, Salt Satyagraha and the Civil Disobedience Movement in all the districts of Orissa were taking place around that time.

On 16 April 1930, Gopabandhu Choudhuri reached the Balasore Satyagraha camp from Cuttack and on that day, he and I were arrested. We were imprisoned for a year and a half.

***Sadhanara Pathe* (Part I) Cuttack : Harekrushna Mahtab Foundation, 1987.**

## Life in the Prison

**Banchhanidhi Patnaik**
Translated by Chinmoy Kumar Hota

WE entered the prison. Our dresses were rolled into bundles and kept aside in a corner with our names written on each of them. We were given jail uniforms—a pair each consisting of shorts, shirts, sheets and undergarments—all bearing black rectangular marks, and a blanket, a coarse mat, a pitcher and earthenware plates. Our legs were manacled, and a board displaying a number was hung from our necks. We looked like poor slayers of cattle, out on the street for alms. We were huddled in a room that had seven or eight brick platforms meant to be our beds. One big earthen pitcher had been placed at a corner, where we were to relieve ourselves during the night.

### Prison Food

WE were given a glass of *genji* (rice gruel mixed with a dash of salt). Every morning, at 11, a ball of rice with a glass of *kolamb* (vegetables and spinach cooked in *arhar dal*) was served to us. In the evenings we were given food again between five and six. After the meals we would be herded back into the room like cattle and locked. Heavy iron railings blocked all the openings of the room—there was no wooden door in sight. The room would have been completely exposed to the elements but for the railings.

On hot summer days, I preferred to remain bare of body save for a strip of loincloth. At times I would break into *merkeya* dance, humming 'dih dih' and slapping my own hip. The days were full of laughter and merriment. Of course, we devoted some time to studies, too. We took special care to avoid going to the latrine at night, because no such facility was available. Everyone had to finish the job during the morning after the doors were thrown open. The earthen plates had to be rubbed with broken pieces of earthenware to clean them off

sticky leftover rice. Otherwise flies and ants would make life miserable.

The food ration was 4 ounces of rice *genji* in the morning, 9 ounces of rice at noon and 7 ounces of rice in the evening. The morning meal was served with a dollop of *chutney* while lunch and dinner came with *kolamb*. This amount of food barely satisfied the hunger of those in the habit of taking large quantities of rice; though I, for one, found it difficult even to finish the meals. The positive side of it was that the food being insufficient there was no fear of indigestion.

As we were undergoing rigorous imprisonment we all had to do some physical labour. But since Rasulkonda was a small sub-jail, there was not much work for us. We were assigned the work of making jute by thrashing *baramasi* leaves. The milk from the raw *baramasi* leaves gave us itches all over. Our skins turned coarse and prickly. When we brought this to the notice of the doctor and the jail superintendent, we were let off this particular job and assigned the simpler task of watering jasmine plants. There were only eight to ten plants requiring a maximum of four to six *lota*s of water a day, and there were six of us. Just to make our job stretch to the closing time, I devised a game called trinity. Two of us played Brahma by making small ridges around the plants while two others acted the part of Vishnu by sprinkling water inside the ridges. The cycle of creation, nurture and destruction was completed by the remaining two, who in their representation of Maheswar, demolished these ridges one by one. The poor plants could not stand this exacting regime and withered within seven to eight days, leaving us with no work to do other than gossiping, reading or lounging.

After some days we were joined by a few others, who had each been sentenced to a month's imprisonment: Madan Mohan Mohapatra, Gadadhar Das, Rajguru Ujjaleswar Patjoshi, the pundit of Badagad royal court and some others from Badagad. The venerable Patjoshi had been brought up in a world full of creature comforts. Aged about forty he was our elder by several years. He could not bring himself to eat from earthen plates. How could a conservative Brahmin like him take food from clay utensils? As he suffered a lot because of this we made plates from the leaves of a banyan tree, which grew in the jail compound.

His potbelly disappeared in a matter of two to three days. His condition made all of us feel miserable. We had found in him the epitome

of patriotism. Having renounced meditation, chanting and all the marks of piety, he happily served out his sentence, so as to emancipate his motherland, which is greater than heaven: *janani janmabhumischa swargadapi gariyasi*. He read to us passages from the *Gita* and the *Bhagabata*, explaining their inner significance. I grew particularly close to him. After being released from the jail, he left active politics to become a *tridandi sanyasi* of the *gaudiya vaishnab* sect. Madan Mohan Mohapatra, son of the royal pundit of Sanakhemundi, was also a devout soul. He used to study with us at Rasulkonda high school. He had brought a quantity of sandalwood with him. We wore sandalwood paste marks all over our bodies. The jailor was a religious Bengali *karan*. Seeing our religious marks, he commented, "You have forfeited all your caste rights by serving prison sentences and having eaten from clay plates. Why this fuss about all these religious marks?"

After some days orders were received to transfer six of us to Cuddalore jail, near Pondicherry in far-off South Arcot district. On the day of transfer our manacles were removed and our dresses given back to us. Four constables were to accompany us. When we were taken out of the main gate the jail warders started weeping. As there was no vehicle available between Rasulkonda and Berhampur, one had to cover the full distance of fifty miles on foot. This distance did not trouble us because we looked forward to the excitement and fun of taking this long walk. We were handcuffed in pairs. When we passed through the streets of Bhanjanangar, people looked on dejectedly from their houses. The scene was a heart-rending one. The news had spread far and wide, and people from villages that fell on our route thronged the streets. When some acquintances exchanged a few words with us, the constables did not stop them. The saddest scene of all unfolded at my village, Gobara.

When we reached my village, hundreds of people from the neighbouring villages had already gathered there. My ailing father, walking stick in hand, approached us with unsteady steps, leaning on two persons. Tears filled the eyes of my uncles and friends. The condition of my father made me miserable and brought tears to my eyes. My younger uncle consoled me, but I could not utter a single word. Everyone suggested that I went home to see my mother, sisters and other loved ones, but who would let me go?

Anyway, the constables agreed and two of them accompanied me to my house. Mother and the womenfolk from the neighbourhood started weeping loudly. I bowed down before them in silence and hurriedly left the place. Then we started for Gangpur. A few followed us for a distance listlessly. This brought to mind the narration of Tulasi Das about the citizens of Ayodhya following Lord Rama, when he headed for the forest. Choked with emotion, we could not exchange even a word with any one. A large crowd greeted us at Kshatriya Barapur also. At Gangpur, we crammed into the small room in the police station. As there was no eating-place around, food was cooked at someone's home. A very bad odour emanated from the room. A petty thief, the only other inmate of the room, wondered how could such decently clad people be inside a police lock-up, and yet be enjoying themselves. Not finding a clue he curled up in a corner and went to sleep. But we could not get any sleep, as we had to press our faces in the opening to escape the stench. Since there was not much space there, we had to do so in turns. In the morning we again set forth after finishing our ablutions. After having lunch and resting ourselves in a roadside hut at Balisira during noon, we arrived at Aska in the evening. We ate our meal inside the police lock-up. In the morning we demanded two bullock carts protesting that we would not be able to walk any further. The renowned physician of the place Dr Braja Sundar Patnaik, popularly known as 'deaf doctor', offered us one cart, but we insisted on two. He said, "My dear boys! If I give you one more cart I will also get dragged into prison like you." We had to be content with one bullock cart. But whoever wants to travel in a cart? We made the old constables ride the cart while we walked alongside making merry. The handcuff would often slide down from my slender hands. The constables begged me to keep wearing them. After taking food and resting at another village, we reached Berhampur in the evening. We were quarantined for two to three days instead of the customary one-week, as we had to start for Cuddalore. That is why we could not see the inside of Berhampur jail. Soon after the train left Berhampur station, the beauty of the world outside our windows kept us engrossed. At Visakhapatnam, we got a chance to meet Sri Biswanath Das, member of Madras Legislative Council, also travelling in the same train to Madras. He gave us a pot of *ghee,*

which we used while eating for the rest of our journey. When we reached Madras we were taken to a police station and kept inside a big hall.

While being paraded in the streets of Madras, the clanking of our chains attracted the attention of the people, who gathered in small groups to have a good look at us. While inside the lock-up, an English Sergeant came and pointed his pistol at us. But instead of showing any fear we nonchalantly inflated our chests. The poor fellow felt embarrassed and left the place smiling nervously. In Madras our meals consisted of rice, *sambar, chutney, chalha* and fried vegetables. In the evening we boarded the train for Cuddalore, which lay 130 miles south of Madras on the seashore. We had to walk about a mile from the station to the jail there. The natural scenery was captivating, with the soothing greenery of ubiquitous coconut palms. Soon the jail, located at an elevated place, came into view. We entered its compound, the walls of which were painted a bright red, and found the environment quite agreeable. A tall tower reared itself from a central place in the compound. Eight rows, each consisting of thirty single rooms, circled the tower. All the prisoners were accommodated in single rooms. A ring road went round these blocks. A hospital and a children's ward lay on the other side of the road. A huge workshop, a big kitchen, the jail office near the gate and a few more single-room blocks completed the jail set-up. There was provision for a shower bath in each room. All the political prisoners of the province had been brought there because of all these facilities.

Jail uniforms were given to us on arrival. Manacles were put on our left ankles and number plates now hung from our necks. Each room had a small drain in a corner, and placed near it were two earthen pitchers, meant to be our latrines. There were two more pitchers for storing drinking water. A coir mat and two blankets were supplied to us. The blanket shed so much wool that, if by chance I drew it over my face, loose fibres would get into my ears and nose. It was impossible for me to sleep on the mat, as the coarse coir threads pricked my flesh. If we had to relieve ourselves at night we had to cover the pitcher with sand to suppress the foul smell. One had to pay for the use of a hurricane lamp, but kerosene was supplied free of cost by the jail authorities. The quality of food here was similar to that served at Rasulkonda. Otherwise life was fun.

Most of the political prisoners of Madras province had been brought over here. We were six Oriyas initially—later, a few others such as Dibakar Patnaik, Radhakant Padhi, Arjun Das, Bharat Behera, Brundaban Panda and Dinabandhu Behera joined us. Dibakar Babu's tall figure, long arms, piercing eyes, hirsute look, and galloping walk terrified the jail officials, especially when he spoke in his mysterious style. All his demands were immediately fulfilled by the warders and physicians. The physicians appeared to be frightened out of their skins before him. The jail doctor and pharmacist would shut the door on the faces of ordinary prisoners, who went to them on the slightest pretext, but no such restrictions existed for Dibakar babu. He brought medicines for everybody and distributed them afterwards.

Dibakar babu's look, gait and above all his utterance of strange words like "sain, sain" instead of the usual "Namaste" or "good morning" really unsettled whomsoever he met. We would often hear him greet the jail officials, "Well doctor, sain, sain", "Well jailor, sain, sain", and so on. Not having a clue to what he was saying, these officials were at a loss for words, and their discomfiture was a source of much merriment for us. One day, it was found that there was one prisoner short. The superintendent, the jailor and the warders started frantically checking each room. Dibakar babu was then in a room adjacent to mine; when the officials passed our rooms the usual "sain,sain" greeted them. They shot back, "What is the matter with you?" When the same sound continued, the officials came to me and asked, "What is the matter with your friend?" I felt like laughing at all this. I just managed to say, "I don't know." After the officials left, Daibakar babu and I had a hearty laugh. Next morning when summons came from the office, Dibakar babu had already changed his room. When the new occupant of his room appeared at the office, he was sent away by the jailor out of frustration.

We Oriyas never had any serious health problems except for an acute attack of pneumonia from which Bhikari Charan Hota suffered. The self-less care and nursing of Dibabkar babu helped him pull through his illness. One morning, while both of them were taking a walk, the superintendent called Bhikari Charan aside and said, "Hota, don't take exhausting walks in the company of that man."

The jail officials were usually cruel and unkind to ordinary prisoners. But we always felt that they had a soft spot in their hearts for political detainees like us. However much they tried to hide it, their affection, sympathy and support for us shone through.

*Mo Katha*. Bhubaneswar: Pujyapuja Orissa, (1988) Second edition, 2003.

# My Days in Swaraj Ashram

**Haricharan Giri**
Translated by Sunand Mishra

I lived in the Swaraj Ashram, Cuttack. There were three hundred residents in the Ashram at that time. Among them were local leaders such as Bhagirathi Mahapatra, Harekrushna Mahtab, Jadumani Mangaraj and Raj Krushna Bose. Dase came at times to stay there for a few days; he would leave abruptly for some place. Dr Atal Bihari Acharya was the Ashram's Superintendent. My work in the Ashram was to spin thread on the spinning wheel for one hour every day and after that to go and collect alms. Different lanes and slums were allotted to different groups. Accordingly, each group went to lanes and slums set apart for it. Every week they had to go to a slum. After a month's stay in the Ashram I became adept at spinning thread.

Atal babu's cousin, Hema had taken some money meant for the Ashram's shopping, which was revealed by me. After this incident I won the trust of Atal babu and others. In course of time, a number of responsibilities were given to me. I took upon myself the responsibility of selling spinning wheels, cotton and cottonseeds. Apart from this, I asked the volunteers to collect alms, which they deposited with me.

The roads of Cuttack were neither wide nor clean as they are today. Big trees growing by roadside made the roads dark in the daytime. The kerosene light of the municipality could not illuminate the entire road in the night. The Chhatra bazar—Station bazar area was like a jungle, and people were scared of going there even during daytime. Tinikonia Bagicha and Buxibazar were also covered by big trees. At the time Cuttack did not have metalled roads. All roads were full of red dust. Rickshaws were not in use. People travelled in horse-driven carriages and bullock carts. The town had six to seven motor cars in all, including that of the officers. Horse carriages were numerous. Red dust kicked up by horse carriages covered the mansions, houses, plants, trees and everything looked red. If one went

outside wearing clean clothes these became dirty in thirty minutes. To escape Cuttack's red dust, I dyed my clothes saffron. Dust and dirt settled on my head and filled my hair with dandruff. To be free from dandruff, I tonsured my head. Looking at my saffron robes everyone started calling me 'Saint'.

The town's Marwari businessmen started calling me 'Gandhi's disciple', 'the country's leader.' They also asked me for news about Swaraj. They took me inside their shops.

The drivers of empty horse carriages would call me and drop me at my destination. The passengers would ask me to sit beside them. Mahatma Gandhi's message in 1921 relating to the spinning wheel had become so popular that prostitutes of Cuttack came under its sway and bought one spinning wheel each. To teach them about spinning, volunteers went to their homes. When news came that volunteers were engaged in antisocial activities in the prostitutes' quarter, the Superintendent, Atal babu called me and said that he was going to stop volunteers from going there. "You go and teach them how to spin thread," he said. I said, "If I go out, how will the spinning class be run here?" He said, "I will do something about that. When you go out, the spinning class will be stopped."

At that time Balu bazar's Masjid lane and Telenga bazar were centres of prostitution. To stop people from drinking alcohol, volunteers of Swaraj Ashram would stand in front of liquor shops in Cuttack and picket from six o' clock in the evening to nine o' clock in the night. There were also illegal wine shops inside the red light areas; the picketers stood in front of these liquor shops as well. The prostitutes of Masjid lane were so notorious that they would throw hot water on the Congress volunteers. This is why the volunteers were reluctant to picket in Masjid lane. But one prostitute named Hema of that lane had bought a spinning wheel. When I went to her house to teach her spinning, she would call me 'Maharaj' 'Maharaj' and show me much respect. In a few days, she learnt how to spin. Rajani babu (Dr. Rajani Chandra Ghose) had a reputation as a good doctor in Cuttack. Sri Ram Chandra Bhanja Medical College of today was known as Medical School at the time. Diseases like cholera, smallpox and malaria caused the death of thousands and the sight of people lying dead was a harrowing experience. Out of all the cholera patients who would go to the Medical School hospital for treatment, half would come to

Rajani babu's dispensary. Rajani babu was a good physician. Patients came from far off villages to his dispensary.

I used to go to Rajani babu's house to teach him and his wife spinning. He would order tiffin for me: two pieces of *luchi,* one rasgolla of the size of a betel nut. At that time such small rasgollas were made in Cuttack. One could entertain a guest spending only three paise. But I did not eat *luchi*. From my childhood butter and milk were not to my taste. When the eldest son of our headmaster was born, he had given *bundis* mixed with puffed rice. I put a handful of puffed rice in the mouth, but did not like the bundis for the smell of butter in them. I also expressed my distaste for luchi and rasgolla. Rajani babu would carry me and made me seat in front of the leaf on which luchi and rasgolla were served. But somehow I would not be able to bring myself to eat these. Although he knew I did not eat luchi and rasgolla, he would insist on my eating these whenever I visited him.

A student of Class Eight, Uday Mishra, who had been campaigning in Raj Kanika, wrote a letter to me after two months. He wrote that the king of Kanika was sending a lawyer, who would catch me from the Ashram and flog me. He asked me to take care. I showed that letter to Atal babu. He also showed it to prominent leaders like Bhagirathi babu. They gave me courage and asked me not to be afraid of him. "How will they take you from us? We shall see. Don't worry."

At that time, my brother was working in the veterinary hospital at Jajpur. He lived there with his family. After a few days he came to Swaraj Ashram. I informed Atal babu when I saw him. Bhagirathi babu and Jadumani babu came to know of his visit. They called my brother to the second floor of the Ashram. I don't know what passed between them, but my brother, without telling me, quietly left the place.

For breakfast the Ashram residents were served flattened rice and molasses, and for lunch and dinner they had rice, dal and curry. Dase came at times and spent two to four days before going off. Whenever he came one Ram barber, who was devoted to him, always accompanied him. Ram worked as his cook as well as servant. He would cook an extra curry and fried vegetables for Dase.

One day, when Ram barber was frying potatoes, I arrived. I said, 'Ram! Can we get a share from this?' He smiled and said, 'All right, you wait till others finish their meal.'

The Ashram's dining bell rang. Everyone went to eat. I did not sit with others but waited: Ram barber served me some fry and some curry. I had a nice meal that day. From that day, whenever Dase stayed in the Ashram, I had a good time. The Ashram had some empty land, where *khada* plants were planted. These grew and at today's price one *khada* plant would fetch no less than two rupees. But at that time one plant was sold for only two paise. Bhagirathi Mahapatra's younger brother Srikrushna Mahapatra was the Superintendent of Police at the time. *The Samaj*, a weekly founded by Pandit Gopabandhu Das, was being published from Satyabadi. The newspaper, *Hitabarta* supported by the government was published from Cuttack. In this paper, news against the Congress regularly appeared. Srikrushna Mahapatra, S.P. also wrote in that paper. *Hitabarta* vilified and ridiculed the Congress and did not forget to mention that *khada* plants were available for two paise each at Swaraj Ashram.

When Mahatma Gandhi first came to Orissa at Pandit Gopabandhu's invitation, it was decided that a meeting would be arranged in Cuttack's Barabati premises. The police clamped Section 144 in Cuttack in order to prevent the Congress from holding this meeting. The local leaders of Orissa were confused. But Pandit Gopabandhu Das in his ingenious way arranged the meeting on the sands of the Kathjodi river where Section 144 did not apply. In an hour all preparations for the meeting were finished. As scheduled before, the meeting started at 4 P.M. Thousands of people gathered on the sands of Kathajodi under a clear sky. While Mahatma Gandhi was giving his speech, a torn winnowing fan was thrown into the meeting by the police. Someone shouted loudly that this should be presented to Mahatma Gandhi. At the end of the meeting Gopabandhu babu asked for the winnowing fan to be auctioned. The auction started. A gentleman paid the highest price of twenty rupees and bought the winnowing fan.

*Mo Jiban Kahani* (pages 41-51). Pipili : H. Giri, 1983.

# Bullets and Brahmins

**Artabandhu Mohanty**
Translated by Supriya Kar

ON the 26th of January 1930, in response to directives from the Indian National Congress, steps were taken to hoist the tricolour all over the country. We – Haris Chandra Das from Neula, Gobardhan Puhan from Arangabad, Indramani Mohanty, Kshetramani Padhi from Rambha — came in a procession from Aurangabad to Jagulai near Godamdeha, hoisted the tricolour there and read out the oath from the letter of the pledge. From that day, I vowed to wear khadi. I took part in the freedom struggle while doing my teaching job. In April 1930, the salt movement was launched. In Bari we cut down date palm trees and dissuaded people from drinking toddy made from date palm juice. A Congress ashram was set up at Aurangabad. A Congress worker called Chakrapani Raul came and stayed there. Congress work gathered momentum. The government also arrested a few party workers. Though I did not let anyone know that I was working for the Congress, I worked for it all the time. I had a book titled *Palasi Abasana* (The End of the Battle of Palasi). The book had been banned by the government. So, whoever possessed it or was found reading it, got arrested. The president of union number four, Purna Chandra Choudhury, borrowed this book from me and falsely alleged that, , Bhagirathi Das had taken this book from me and read out from it at a meeting held at Budha Thakur, near Aurangabad on on 13th July 1930. The S.D.O. Jajpur, ordered the police to conduct an enquiry. When the police asked me whether I owned that book, I said that it did not belong to me. A case was filed against Bhagirathi Das and he was arrested under the Security of India Act. We held a meeting where we decided that we would fight this case by filing yet another case. When the case came up for trial, it was found to be baseless. Bhagirathi Babu got acquitted and Purna Chandra Choudhury was dismissed from the job of union president. We also boycotted him..

In 1930, Gobardhan Puhan, Bhagirath Das, Harischandra Das, Abhiram Sahani, Haladhara Sahani, Bansidhar Dwibedi, Bipin Bihari Mohanty, Krupasindhu Khuntia from the Bari area, Adharmani Dei of Atira, Chhaya Dei of Paghida, Haripriya Dei of Andapur, Usha Dei of Rambha, Malati Dei and a few others got arrested and were sent to jail. At that time Ramadevi had come to Bari and was staying at Bhagirathi Das's house.

In 1932, I got the tricolour hoisted at the Alipur haat and near the temple of Jagulai in Ramachandrapur. This created awareness about the Congress among the general public. The police therefore kept a close watch over me. But as they had no evidence against, they only warned me saying, " You may wear khadi if you like, but don't take any active part in the movement." However, I did everything secretly at night and avoided doing anything openly. Congress bulletins were sent to me via Indapur and I brought those over to Bari Ashram. Tailokya Nath Das of Indapur brought these to me. Once the police carried out a search operation to arrest a young freedom fighter called Kahnu Das. Gangadhar Dwivedi, the S.I. of Binjharpur was an extremely cruel person. Those days, the road from Bari Dak Bungalow to Aurangabad was a good one. This police officer went to Aurangabad riding a bicycle. To teach him a lesson, Dasrathi Samal, Maheswar Das and I laid logs of wood across his path. These were not visible as they lay in the shade of a tree. As he came riding his bicycle at great speed, he hit the log and fell. We had hidden ourselves among the overhanging branches. We had a good laugh when we saw him fall. He rose to his feet, picked up the bicycle and rode to the dak bungalow. We often harassed the police by doing such things.

While teaching at Ramachandrapur school, I started the celebration of Ganesh Puja there. Sri Benudhar Beuria , Sri Aditya Bal, Srikrushna Chandra Kar and others helped me in organizing the puja. I allowed Harijans to take part in the puja, and started spinning sessions. This upset the secretary of the school. Mahatma Gandhi, accompanied by Harijans, arrived in Bari on 31st May 1934. To meet his expenses, Gopabandhu Babu and I had collected 108 rupees through donations. Arrangements for accommodating Gandhi were made in Baman babu's courtyard.. Choudhury Purna Chandra Mohaptra bore the boarding expenses of Gandhi and his team. At six in the morning, a meeting

was held at Bagda meeting ground. Attendance at this meeting was thin as many found it inconvenient to come so early in the morning. So another meeting was held at a mango grove near Atira by the road to Sahaspur. Gandhiji spoke on the need for the abolition of untouchability. To mark the occasion, Harijans organised a fair. Inspired by Gandhiji's address, Gobardhan Puhan accepted a drink of water from a Harijan. He was the first person in our area to do so.

Many eminent persons from Bari came to Baman Babu's courtyard to meet Gandhiji. Baman Babu and his son Naba Babu accepted Gandhi's views on untouchability in principle but they dared not put these into practice for fear of objections from a few orthodox brahmins. In response to this, Gandhiji observed that, while people braved the bullets while fighting the British government, they remained scared of Brahmins. It was decided that the Harijans would be allowed to enter temples later. Gandhiji said, "See to it that I receive the assurance that this will be done before I reach Bhadrak."

"Jiban Smruti". unfinished autobiography in *Artabandhu Smarane*, Cuttack: Gramasevak Samabaya Prakashan Ltd, 1990.

# Kudanagari Ashram

**Udayanath Sarangi**
Translated by Jatindra Kumar Nayak

SIMULIA is a small village lying on the bank of river Chitrotpala. At one end of the village, on the river bank, stood a huge banyan tree. Its long branches propped up by drop-roots spread in all directions. The tree occupied a large area, which was a place of worship. Every evening, some religious function or the other used to get celebrated here. People believed that the tree was the abode of a jealous goddess, who punished evil deeds or immoral acts with instant death.

The area was popularly known as Kudanagari. The post office in the village nearby was known as Kudanagari Post office. A primary school, which was housed in the post office, was also called Kudanagari Primary School. The old postmaster doubled as the school master. He received five rupees as his salary as the postmaster; for his services as the school master, he was paid five rupees a month by the district board.

In 1923, Chandrasekhar Mishra founded Kudanagari Ashram in Simulia. His activities included spreading Mahatma Gandhi's message in the villages around, getting people to pay four annas and become members of the Congress, and raising subscriptions for the Tilak fund. Another important activity which kept him quite busy was dispensing medicines to villagers, who fell ill.

The area was undeveloped and was vulnerable to floods. The services of vaidyas or kabirajs were not available to people here. There was no dispensary in the area, either. People suffered from diseases such as malaria, cholera and small pox throughout the year, and the diseases claimed many lives.

Chandrasekhar babu went from village to village carrying a homeopathic medicine box in hand. He gave patients medicines after doing a check-up. His humility, his friendly disposition and the services he tirelessly rendered the ailing endeared him to people in the villages around Simulia.

Chandrasekhar babu requested Gopabandhu Choudhuri to send someone to assist him. I was chosen from Alakashram to go to Kudanagari.

At Kudanagari ashram I was placed in charge of carding cotton and spinning. I toured the villages and taught people, especially women, how to card cotton, and taught them the art of spinning, which many had forgotten. Broken spinning wheels lying abandoned in the cellars were brought down and repaired. New spinning wheels were made. The village carpenters found work. Spinning wheels now whirred noisily in almost every house. Of course, people could not weave sarees or dhotis, but they could make towels, blankets and covers at home and did not have to buy these from the market.

The cotton plants growing in people's backyards were now looked after with great care. Some villagers used to grow cotton in small plots of land. They were now very happy. Others followed their example. Other villages also took to growing cotton.

It was my job to teach village women how to card cotton and to spin and my field of work expanded rapidly. I was in great demand. Every day, I received an invitation from some village or the other.

Whenever Chandrasekhar babu treated patients in a village, grateful villagers brought a seer of rice, a piece of pumpkin, or a slice of gourd as gifts to the Ashram. This happened eight to ten times in a month. The Khadi Board in Cuttack gave a Khadi worker eight rupees a month as maintenance allowance. However, during the year and a half I spent in the Ashram, I received this allowance only thrice. A dedicated social worker from Aul, Sri Sahadev Das came and joined us. Touring villages to raise the consciousness of people and to organise the villages was his responsibility. The three of us had to survive on this allowance and the gifts people brought us.

The house in which the Ashram was run belonged to one Haricharan Mohanty, who was a government servant. (He worked as a Kanungo in the Settlement department). He lived away from the village. Whenever he came home, he would send us rice, dal and vegetables. But the fear of the police kept him away from the Ashram. He never set his foot there, nor did he ever talk to us.

I used to get up very early in the morning and do the cooking. We ate rice, a dish made of yogurt, or mashed potato. An old woman

brought us sour curd worth one paisa every morning. We did not pay her daily; she took the money once in eight or ten days, whenever it was convenient.

After our meal, we would go our different ways : Chandrasekhar babu would go to see his patients; Sahadeb babu would go to talk to people; and I would go out, taking my carder with me. We would get back to the Ashram after dark. For our dinner, we had rice flakes or puffed rice.

One day, a young man came and invited me to go to his village. His eagerness pleased me. He said, 'Our village is not very far from here. It is only a kos (two miles) away.'

We had done no cooking that morning for there was no rice left in the Ashram. I set off at eight for that village, carder in hand. The rains had come. The flood waters had just receded after drowning the fields and the paths. I had to plod through water and mud as I negotiated the narrow ridges running through rice fields. Tall rice-stalks, which rose up to my neck, lashed me when the wind swept through them. I thought I trod on water snakes, snails and crabs as I waded through the mud. But there was no way I could look down and find out.

The young man's village actually lay at a distance of around seven or eight miles. I arrived there at eleven. The young man was so happy he ran from one end of the village to the other announcing my arrival. Now everyone wanted me to visit his house first. It was a large village inhabited by well-to-do farmers.

Anyway, I had to work very hard that day, going from one house to another. I was oblivious of the passing of the hours. Hunger now gnawed at my entrails.

It was four in the afternoon. It was time I went back to the Ashram. An old woman asked me to come to her house. It had been raining in flurries throughout the day. Soon it would get dark. I wanted to leave the village quickly and be on my way.

But the old woman would not listen. In the end, I gave in and followed her.

I thought the old woman would ask me to repair her spinning wheel or ask me to teach her daughter-in-law how to spin. But she took me inside her house, and said, "My son, you have spent the whole day here working. You have not.had a morsel of food. I will soak some rice flakes. You must be very hungry. Eat this."

I tried to dissuade the old woman saying, "It is getting dark and the rains are coming in flurries. I have to cover such a long distance walking through wet rice fields. I am in a hurry." When the young man - he was the old woman's son- who had brought me said, "I will accompany you to the Ashram," I agreed to stay a little longer.

I sat down on the floor. The old woman placed a bowl containing soaked rice flakes before me. She then went into another room to get some molasses.

Suddenly someone came running in. He was gasping for breath. I saw that the young man's face turned deathly pale. The old woman, a lump of molasses in hand, trembled all over.

She came up to me and whispered, "The police has come to the village. The chowkidar is with them." Tears were now rolling down her checks. "They will arrest everybody. They will take my son, too, and beat him up. What shall I do ?"

"Go away. If you don't, I'll be undone," her son said, incoherent with panic.

I got up. In fact I was raring to confront the police. Going to jail brought one glory at the time. But I did not want the villagers to get into trouble and the old woman's son to get beaten up on my account.

The bowl containing rice flakes lay untouched. I got up, slipped out through the back-door and ran into the dense jungle of rice stalks.

*Gandhi Maharajanka Sishya.* Cuttack : Orissa Book Store, 1981.

# Glory to India, Our Motherland

**Ramakrushna Nanda**

Translated by Rabindra K. Swain

I passed the Matriculation examination in second division. Due to my father's untimely death, my prolonged illness and poverty, the boat of my life was tossing about in a stormy sea. In those days of my personal crisis a historic event changed the lives of people. I was among thousands of students who were swept off their feet by that whirlwind. Mahatma Gandhi had launched the non-cooperation movement. On his return from the Congress session at Calcutta, Gopabandhu Das spread the message of the movement among the rural folk. I saw that great man for the first time in a meeting at Tinkonia Bagicha in Cuttack. That day, after the school was closed, I went with my friends to attend that meeting. I had not even the faintest idea that his speech would change the course of my life completely.

Pandit Gopabandhu explained the significance of non-cooperation movement to the people. He spoke eloquently about the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, the Rowlatt Act and, above all, the acts of tyranny and exploitation perpetrated by the British government. He also told the people about the inspiring leadership of Mahatmaji, the meaning of Swaraj, and the various aspects of the non-cooperation movement. He became so emotional that his throat swelled up. Some of his sentences stretched long, and it appeared that he strained his lungs to complete them. Never before had I listened to such oratory. Leading the disciplined life of a student I was merely a bookworm. Nobody had taught me about the world at large. Pandit Gopabandhu's speech created a ripple in my mind. I returned home excited.

The next day the atmosphere in Cuttack was charged with excitement. The students were among the first to feel the impact. In the school, I noticed that the students were discussing the previous evening's speech. No one seemed to be interested in studies. In the absence of the teacher, the students wrote words like Gandhi, Non-

cooperation, Swaraj etc. on the blackboard and felt pleased with themselves. After a period or two, the students quit the class rooms and assembled on the roads. All that the teachers said to dissuade us were of no avail.

We strode proudly towards the P.M. Academy. Later, the students from Syed Missionary and Victoria school joined us. A great procession of the high school students moved towards the Satyabadi Press through the court, via Nayasadak and Balubazar. Teachers and students of Ravenshaw College looked cluriously at us. At that time Ravenshaw College functioned in the campus of the Collegiate school.

On getting to know about our arrival, Gopabandhu came out of his house to meet us. Whatever passed between him and the student leaders was not known to us. I was at the back and was informed that he asked the reason for our strike.

"We'll study in national schools. We'll not attend the ones run by the British government."

"In that case you should inform the college authorities. Only when they refuse to pay heed to you should you go on strike. Did I ever tell you to leave the school like this without informing the authorities? Now, go back to your schools."

The scorching sun overhead, the calm figure of a sage like Gopabandhu before us, and the despair and pain of futility within; we found ourselves in a fix for sometime. Then we went back to our respective schools.

Students get carried away without assessing the merit of their action. The excitement of the movement can lead students down the wrong path. Warned by Gopabandhu Das, most of the students returned to their schools. I felt ashamed of showing my face to my teachers so soon. I went to my village and stayed there for four to five days.

For a couple of months I could not concentrate on my studies. Every other day a meeting was held somewhere, most of the days on the sands of river Kathajodi. A few people left their jobs, some left their legal professions, others gave up their titles. Young student leaders like Jadumani Mangaraj and Rajakrishna Bose discontinued their college studies and went on delivering provocative speeches. Heaps of foreign made clothes were burnt on the sands of the river. There were a spurt of activities in the SwarajAshram, with leaders and workers from different places arriving there.

I used to watch their activities. After my father's death, I had lost interest in my studies. I was no more eager or sure about anything. I was always plagued by financial difficulties. At this time came the call to join the freedom movement.

As my luck would have it, it was time for my quarterly examination, but as I was not prepared. I chose to give up studies. One evening when I was reading, the great patriotic song "Glory to India, our Motherland" came floating towards us from the bank of river Kathajodi. In fact, the members of the Ashram were carrying the bier of a volunteer to the Khannagar cemetery, singing that song. My heart leapt up. I felt like immediately running to them and joining the procession and the chorus. Since I had committed such a mistake earlier, this time I held back. I thought that whatever I would do, I would do after much deliberation, so that I would repent later.

I did appear at the quarterly examination and was not sure what I wrote on the examination paper. Once I had decided to discontinue my studies, they held no prospects for me. After the examination I stopped going to school. By then, hundreds of students like me had discontinued their studies. They had joined the ashram. I also followed suit.

"Asahayoga Andolanare Yogadan" from *Jeevana Taranga* Cuttack : Soudamini Prakashan, 1989.

# A Day of Reckoning

**Krushna Chandra Kar**
Translated by R. C. Rout

ON 20th December 1920 I reached Cuttack by train. As planned, I stayed with Damodar babu, a prosperous advocate and a relation of mine at his Jaunliapatti residence. His younger son, Bidyadhar, a B.Sc. student of Ravenshaw College, was at home and was yet to decide as to whether he would go somewhere to spend the Christmas holidays or stay at Cuttack. His elder son, Ratnakar, had left for the village for a couple of days. Damodar babu was to go to the village after Ratnakar returned.

Damodar babu worked in his chamber in the morning; he went to the court at 10 AM and returned home at 5 PM, with his pocket full of currency notes. He would work in the chamber from 8 PM to 10.30 PM, prepare for the cases to be tried the following day and tutor the witnesses. He lived and worked on the first floor. Unless it was absolutely necessary, noone disturbed him. All others, including relatives and guests, lived on the ground floor. Damodar babu had no time to watch the movements of Bidyadhar during the holidays. One afternoon, possibly on the 3rd or 4th day of my arrival (i.e. either on 22nd or 23rd December 1920), Bidyadhar told me to dress up and accompany him to attend a 'Swadeshi' meeting.

It was the first time I heard him speak in such a tender and affectionate tone. I immediately put on my dress and followed him. We had to walk barefoot; chappals were hardly in use in Cuttack those days. We walked the distance from Jaunliapatti to Tinikonia Park via Keuta sahi, Ramsankar Hospital, the Jail gate and the Printing Company gate. We came into a big space covered with a lush green carpet of grass, behind Pyari Mohan Academy, to the west side of the main road.

On our way to the meeting ground I asked Bidyadhar what this Swadeshi meeting was all about. He explained to me that the foreign

rulers were exploiters. The leaders of our country were organising meetings to spread the message of Mahatma Gandhi, in order to establish home rule by ousting the foreign rulers. Such meetings were called Swadeshi or Congress meetings. He also added that Mahatma Gandhi was the undisputed leader of this non-cooperation movement. Recently, in an emergency meeting of the All India National Congress held at Calcutta, a programme of action had been chalked out to carry the message of non-cooperation to every nook and corner of the country. Accordingly, Lala Lajpat Ray asked Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das to take the leadership of the organisation. Utkalmani was also given the responsibility of spreading the message of non-cooperation in remote areas of Orissa. He was doing his best to do that. In this context, the first meeting of the non-cooperation movement had been arranged at Tinkonia Bagicha.

I grew inquisitive and asked him to explain the meaning of 'non-cooperation' to me. He told me that it meant the rejection of foreign goods and non-co-operation with the foreign rulers, snapping of relationship with them. It meant the use of Swadeshi cloth and discarding foreign clothes; it also meant settling all disputes at village panchayats instead of moving the law courts, and boycotting of schools, colleges and government offices by students and employees.

There were about 40 to 50 persons on the meeting ground when we reached there. But minutes before the meeting really started, waves of people poured in from all sides. In the twinkling of an eye, the vast empty field was changed into a sea of humanity. A makeshift pandal had been constructed at the south end of the field. The speakers were to address the gathering from that raised platform. In the front, a microphone was fixed to make the speeches audible to the vast audience. In one corner, issues of a daily Indian newspaper, *The Statesman* which was notorious in those days for its one-sided pro-British news and views, were kept nicely like a heap of straw. At this time, a dark complexioned brilliant youngman, fully dressed in foreign clothes from head to foot came briskly walking towards the pandal. Naturally, the eyes of the audience turned towards him. At once, a whisper spread through the vast multitude of people. Obviously it was about the black 'sahib' who had arrived there. Within minutes the curiousity was satisfied. By word of mouth the answer spread :

the youngman was Jadumani Mangaraj, a student of the B.A. class in Ravenshaw College. He was a student leader, famous for his fiery eloquence and inspiring oratory. He was particularly known for his provocative speeches. Bidyadhar had, by then, explained to me the outstanding qualities of Sri Mangaraj.

The meeting started on time. Gopabandhu, whose heart and soul were completely dedicated to the motherland, stood up and in his solemn patriotic style explained to the audience the purpose of the meeting and the meaning, scope and programmes of the non-co-operation movement. The audience listened to him with rapt attention. He exhorted the people of Orissa to strengthen the hands of Mahatma Gandhi by joining the non-cooperation movement. He also appealed to one and all with folded hands to join the National Congress and make the fredom struggle more powerful. The meeting place resounded with continuous applause coming from all sides. For about one hour, Gopabandhu spoke continuously and advised the people about their duties and responsibilities. He called upon his countrymen to free Mother India from the chains of foreign rule. His speech left a deep psychological impact on the audience.

The moment Das's speech came to an end, Jadumani Mangaraj left the dais and moved at lightning speed towards the nicely arranged pile of *The Satesman*. He lit a matchstick and set fire to the heap. In no time the fire spread its tongues in all directions with the help of a favourable wind. Yadumani, the richman's son in costly western attire, suddenly surprised everybody present by removing his hat and throwing it into the flames. Then, one by one, he removed his coat, necktie, collar, full sleeved shirt,vest, shoes, socks, trousers and flung them into the flames. He had now nothing but his underwear on his body. Gopabandhu instantly handed a handwoven khadar dhoti to Mangaraj. The crowd applauded loudly when r Mangaraj put on the dhoti. Now the last remnant of the British attire, the underwear was thrown into the flames as a ritual offering to the fire. The crowd stood wonderstruck, watching this dramatic event wide eyed. Then Gopabandhu adorned Jadumani's broad shoulders with a khadar chadar. The newly initiated Jadumani bowed down before his political guru and asked for his blessings. From that day the brilliant young man bade farewell to his college education, and joined Congress as a

paid-up member and worked for it. When the newspapers were consigned to flames, the scene resembled the fire on the occasion of the Agni Purnima, the fullmoon day in the month of Magha. It was indeed an important occasion in the history of non-cooperation movement in Orissa.

In response to the spontaneous and overwhelming request of the crowd, the young student leader Jadumani addressed the excited congregation. Thousands of eyes were focussed on the radiant face of the young hero of the day. The young man went on speaking eloquently; his voice mesmerised the crowd. The flame of fire that issued forth from his fiery speech burnt away the settled ideas in the minds of the people. It inspired and excited them. It certainly instilled in their hearts a feeling of hatred and anger, towards the British Raj. In response to the call given by this firebrand speaker, hundreds of people, students, teachers, lawyers, intellectuals, and government servants spontaneously came forward and enrolled themselves as members of the Congress. In the process, they joined the mainstream of the national movement. At least two persons with the surname 'Kars' were among the such people, who joined Congress. One was Bidyadhar, the college-going younger son of advocate Damodar Kar, and the other was Nilakantha Kar, who worked as a junior clerk in the Chandnichowk Post Office.

*Hajila Dinara Smruti* Cuttack: Granth Mandir, 1991.

## Spreading the Message of Congress in Villages

**Chintamani Mishra**

Translated by Jatindra Kumar Nayak

WHEN I came home during the summer holidays I longed to spend a few days in my village. I had been staying away from there since 1916. When I had come home in 1919 from Bolangir during the summer vacation I was not able to spend even a full month in my village at the time. This time I so much wanted to stay with my younger brothers and help them with their studies. My childhood friends also tried to persuade me to stay back, awakening in me fond memories of the time we had spent together as children. But at the same time I was eager to go to the Swarajya Ashram in Khurda and spread the message of Congress in the Khurda area.The thought that a report of the work I had done during the summer vacation would make Gopabandhu happy when I would meet him in Satyabadi was also a great incentive.

From our village three boys including me had joined the school at Satyabadi. One of us did not want to do propaganda work and after the summer vacation left Satyabadi and went to study at another school. In due course he passed the matriculation examination and found himself a job. The other boy accompanied me to the Swarajya Ashram at Khurda. He was my 'mita'. The two of us set off for Khurdha and requested the persons in charge of the ashram to send both of us together to one area.

At that time the man who managed the Swarajya Ashram at Khurda was Late Narasingh Chyau Pattnaik. He was its secretary, and the president of the Ashram was Raghunath Mohapatra. The latter hailed from Bhubaneswar. He had joined the non-cooperation movement giving up his job as the headmaster of Banpur minor school. He was an elderly man but he was extremely modest. He devoted all his time to spinning leaving the affairs of the ashram in Narashingha babu's care. Narasingha babu had left his studies while a student of intermediate classes. One of his classmates, Dukhishyam Das had

also given up his college studies and was living in the ashram. But, eclipsed by Narasingh babu, he maintained a very low profile. From the way he bore himself and dressed himself it was difficult for me at first to take him to be an educated person. Later I got close to him. He is no more. I have seen few who are cleverer or more intelligent than him. But he was so utterly indifferent to promoting himself that his intelligence and his abilities were of little use in his life. He could never take the place he deserved among Congressmen.

I still remember how Dukhishyam was sitting in the corner of a room when we two friends first entered the Swarajya ashram. I also remember our first impression of Chyau Pattnaik. I thought at the time that the job of a police daroga would have suited him much better. He was beginning to make a name for himself among Congressmen when he was struck by an incurable disease while still very young and died a painful and untimely death.

We were subjected to Narasingha babu's harsh discipline for a couple of days and after receiving training from him set out for the area around the Bhubaneswar police station to do propaganda work. We carried with us eight annas, a booklet consisting of fifty Congress membership forms, and a similar booklet consisting of receipts for collecting subscriptions to the Tilak Swaraj fund. We were given instruction that we had to use all the forms and receipts in a week's time. We were severely warned that our daily expenses should on no account exceed two annas. When we began our journey our hearts were filled not with hopes of winning praise but with the fear of being rebuked.

I remember that we first went to village Badagada which lies to the east of what is now the state capital. During the first half of the day we managed to get four or five persons enrolled as members of the Congress party and we collected subscriptions amounting to one rupee and a half to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. If we could get so much done on the space of only half a day we could easily dispose of all the receipts and forms in the two booklets in a short time – this thought made us feel happy and excited. We received gifts of rice and lentils. An old gentleman found us a place where we could cook our midday meal, sat beside us and gave us lessons in cooking. A little while earlier, 20, maybe 25 persons had gathered to listen to us near a

platform. I had given the first public speech of my life there and was feeling a little proud of myself. I slept on the wide verandah of the house of a villager and saw sweet dreams. Why should the thought that our condition would become utterly miserable by the night of the next day cross my mind then?

When we got up very early the next day and made our way to the neighbouring village we had a new companion. He was the choukidar of the locality. The officer of the Bhubaneswar police station had been informed of our arrival the night before. The choukidar had been ordered to accompany us wherever we went and threaten everyone whose house we entered and report the names of anyone who talked to us to the police station. He set about performing his duty with aggressive thoroughness. We were turned away from all doors. With great difficulty we managed to enroll only one person as member of the Congress party before noon. We did not get an opportunity even to open the booklet meant for the Tilak Swaraj Fund.

In the morning we had eaten puffed rice worth one paise. We had bought rice worth four paise, which we were carrying in our cotton towel. But where would we do the cooking? Whenever we approached anyone in the village for help he told us that he had no tumblers or cooking pots to spare. An elderly man advised us to go to the bazaar in Bhubaneswar, buy ourselves some puffed or beaten rice and return to Khurda after having lunch of it. If he had not made this suggestion, may be we would have followed this course of action. But his attempt to frighten us made me determined to hold a meeting in that village by all means in the evening. If no one gave us cooking pots we would soak the rice in the waters of some pond and help ourselves to it. Only those who have seen how the water in ponds in Khurdha look like in the summer months would be able imagine how heroic our resolution was.

Hunger almost reduced us to tears. When we climbed the verandah of the last house in the village, a middle-aged woman opened the door. She was moved to pity when she came to know that we had had nothing to eat although it was well past midday. On being informed that we were two brahmin boys and that we were carrying rice and lentils with us, she set before us a brass cooking pot, a tumbler and a piece of rope and said, 'My sons, there is only one cooking pot in my

house. You first cook rice in it. Then empty the rice on to a banana leaf and cook dal in the same pot." She also gave us a few pieces of firewood. When she inquired about our caste, I wished she would offer us some soaked rice. But my friend was acutely conscious of being a pure brahmin even at a time like that and, again, in those days no widow would dare commit the sin of serving out soaked rice from her own pots to two brahmin boys.

The moment we reached for the tumbler and the cooking pot the chaukidar warned the widow, "Mother, the daroga has forbidden everyone to give cooking pots to these people." The widow exploded, "What kind of wretch your daroga is? These are young boys and brahmin boys at that. They are dying of hunger and you are asking me not to give them a tumbler and a cooking pot? Go and tell your daroga that he can arrest me and take me to the police station. Why don't people like you drop dead?" The chaukidar said nothing and followed us quietly to the bhagat room and sat on the verandah.

I took upon myself the job of cooking. My friend washed the rice in the cooking pot and scooped it and put it on the banana leaf the widow had given us. I lit the fireplace. It seemed as if the faggots too were scared of the daroga and the chaukidar: they caught fire after along time. I put the rice into the pot. As soon as the water started boiling drained it off and emptied the rice onto the two banana leaves my friend had laid on the veranda of the bhagat room. I now set about cooking dal. My friend kept pressing the rice with his hands to keep it from getting cold. But the rice was half boiled and it was difficult to form it into a mound. Anyway, I finished cooking dal before the rice could get cold and poured it into a hole made in the mound of rice straight from the pot. But the rice and the dal refused to have anything to do with each other. The liquid part of the dal seeped away through the rice and the grains of dal, which could not sink in, adorned the rice mound like the crown of a temple.

My friend had had a pampered childhood and was unsuited to the hardships of life. But I swallowed half of the food on my leaf in two minutes' time. He swallowed only a couple of handfuls of rice and dal, drank water and got up. On the banana leaves we had eaten off more than half of the food we had cooked remained uneaten. I noticed that the chaukidar was looking hungrily at the banana leaves. So I

asked him to take the two leaves out and eat the food left and clean the room after eating. But he sat still and only kept staring at us. I thought he would not like eating food left over on our leaves. I again thought he hesitated to eat because of the nasty look my friend gave me when I offered food to someone who had put us in such a difficult situation. Following us all day long since morning he had not put even a morsel of food into his mouth. At last I realized that, as he was an untouchable, he would not dare to enter the bhagat room. So we took out the two banana leaves and laid them before him below the steps leading up to the verandah. Then my friend and I cleaned the bhagat room.

When we tried to hold a meeting in the evening the chaukidar would not forget his duty and dissuaded people from attending it. We had provided him only one meal during the day. The thought that, if he would fail to do his duty his children would always starve, must have scared him. Any way, ten to fifteen persons assembled to hear us speak of Mahatma Gandhi and Gopabandhu Das. A number of children had also gathered, but they ran home when the elders gave them stern looks. As far as possible I repeated the lectures I had heard Gopabandhu give. We managed to enroll only two members. I told the audience of Gandhi's confident claim that India would attain swarajya if one crore people enrolled themselves as members of Congress and if one crore rupees were contributed to the Tilak fund. To this I added what Gopabandhu had said about the shape swarajya would take from the first of July. I closed by telling them who among our leaders would become a district magistrate and who a subdivisional officer and who a police officer and mentioned where they would hold these offices. My lecture earned us permission to sleep in the bhagat room at night and a quantity of puffed rice and sweetened rice.

The next day, we went to Rasulgarh or Asulgarh. There a villager gave us a place to stay and provisions, not bothering about the chaukidar's warning. Two to three persons became members of Congress and some money was collected for the Tilak fund. We spent the night there and, the next day, taking to a jungle path and asking people the way, we finally arrived in Ghatikia. There we got something to eat in the house of Badapanda. We passed the midday pleasantly

enough and organised a small meeting in the evening in front of his house.

Our next stop was village Naragoda, the village where Digambar Srichandan lived. Srichandan had given up his job as peshakar at the tehsildar's office in Banpur and, as he came from a distinguished family, was treated with respect by our leaders. He was away from home on that day. His son was my classmate and had given up his studies when I did. So we were received warmly in his house. In the evening, a large meeting was held. By this time I had addressed five or six meetings, changing here and there Gopabandhu Das's speeches, and had begun to look upon myself as an accomplished public speaker. The ten rupees in my pocket that we had got by enrolling members to the Congress and through donations to the Tilak fund had also rendered me too confident of myself. My speech began well. Around me sat elderly people from all castes–brahmins, karanas, khandayats, oilmen, sweetsellers, artisans and farmers – close together. Long afterwards I realized that their admiring glances had made me go over the top that day. I ran out of material to talk about after speaking for a while. I remembered that I had forgotten to touch upon one important subject. On one occasion, while giving a speech in front of the temple in Sakshigopal on boycotting mill-made clothes, Gopabandhu had described how young women looked as they came out of ponds wearing such fine clothes after a bath. I thought my audience would find it very interesting if I talked on the same subject here. Gopabandhu was a devotee of Lord Krishna, a poet and he knew how to get away with talking about indelicate subjects at meetings held in rural areas. I chose a few of these things and talked about these in the hope of entertaining my audience. Before five minutes had passed, an old brahmin shouted, "Enough. Now sit down. You are but a baby. If one pressed your cheeks mother's milk would come out of your mouth. What audacity! Have you forgotten that men your father's or grandfather's age are sitting before you?"

Readers can easily imagine how I must be feeling after this. In a matter of a few minutes the meeting place became empty. A few hurricane lamps which some people had brought with them also disappeared. Only the three of us_- my *mita,* my classmate who had given us hospitality in the morning and I myself – were left. I was no longer my earlier self. I have forgotten to mention earlier that I was

born carrying a cartload of anger within me. This expressed itself as tyranny over people weaker than me and in the form of pique and fierce resentment against those stronger than me. I resolved not to take even a drop of water in that village. Puffed rice worth two paise were bought. I gave half of it to my mita and the rest I tied into my towel. The membership forms, the receipt book for Tilak fund and the money left after we had spent seven annas out of it during the last four days I put into my bag and began my return journey. My plan was to go to Bhubaneswar through Khandagiri and from there go to the railway station, and travel by train to Jatani. Then I would walk all the way from Jatani to the Swarajya Ashram in Khurda. I knew that Jagabandhu babu would have arrived in the Swarajya ashram from Puri by the time I got there. I thought that, when I would tell him of the insult I received in Nargoda, he would lose no time in getting there. He would teach the old brahmin a lesson at the meeting he would hold in this village and only then my anger would subside and I would find peace. Neither my mita nor my classmate could make me change my decision to leave the village immediately. A few old men came to me and said, 'Khandagiri is a haunt of tigers. The road to the railway station in Bhubaneswar lies through a dense jungle. If you travel so late at nightyou will get killed by a tiger. Eat something and stay the night here. Do whatever you like tomorrow morning.' May be I would have listened to their advice. But among the old men who were trying to pacify me I spotted the old brahmin who had made me so miserable a little while earlier. To me he seemed more terrifying than even a tiger. Blood had rushed to my head and was pouring out of my eyes as a flood of tears. I set off immediately for the place where I had come from.

*Ardhashatabdira Anubhuti*. Vol.I, Cuttack: Nabajiban Pustakalaya, 1983

# Gopabandhu Das Addresses a Meeting

**Brajabandhu Das**

Translated by Prabhat Kumar Sahoo

WE came to know that Pandit Gopabandhu Das would address a meeting of Congress workers near the temple of Goddess Bhagabati at Banpur. I was a student of Class VI at the time. The officer of the Banpur Police Station, Mr Dilbar Hussain moved from village to village on horseback and warned people against attending the meeting. The chowkidar and other petty officials helped him in his work. Dilbar Hussain came to our school and threatened the headmaster that if any teacher or student of the school attended the meeting, a report would be sent against the headmaster and he would be dismissed from service. But how could such threatening dampen the spirit of the strong-willed nationalist headmaster? Some of us could not resist the temptation of listening to Pandit Gopabandhu Das's speech. We expressed our desire to our teacher, Chintamani Jena. He took us to the headmaster. He was glad to hear this and instructed Jena babu to accompany us to the meeting and find a safe place for us there. He also told him to be careful as there was always the fear of police harassing the students.

In the darkness of the evening, escorted by Jena babu, we walked past Kapileswar temple, to the venue of the meeting. We sat silently on the verandah of a sweetmeat shop. A table and a chair had been placed in front of the Bhagabati temple. A petromax light was lit and kept on the table. Only a few persons were moving about. Pandit Raghunath Mohapatra, Headmaster of the National School set up by Pandit Godabarish, stood waiting, a garland in hand. It was quiet everywhere. A little later, Pandit Gopabandhu came out of the temple and noticed that people had not come to the meeting for fear of the police. He shouted, "You cowardly people of Banpur. Oh Lord! How can You stand this? Let the clouds burst and thunder and lightning strike this place. Let Chilika wash the place away." Hundreds of men

came out of hiding and assembled. The place got crowded. Pandit Raghunath Mohapatra garlanded Pandit Gopabandhu, who spoke for about an hour. He called upon the people to discard foreign goods and engage themselves in doing constructive work. The personality of Pandit Das, his words and the style of his delivery left a deep impression on our minds.

*Yatrapathe Satyagrahi.* Tangi : Udayanath Maharana, 1999.

# The August Revolution at Talcher

**Pabitra Mohan Pradhan**

Translated by Marina Priyadarshinee Mohapatra

SOME people think that the August Revolution at Talcher was the outcome of the rumour of my death and the desire to avenge it. But this was not the case. Of course, the rumour of my death had kindled the fire of revenge in the hearts in people of this feudatory state. This was indeed the immediate cause of the popular uprising. But this was not the sole cause of the August Revolution there. The uprising of 1938-39 and the famous Hizarat revolt, which continued successfully for a period of one whole year, ultimately took the shape of a freedom movement and formed a part of the August Revolution. During this period people acquired political training which strengthened their organisation. This ultimately kindled in them the urge for political awareness and independence. The Quit India Movement gave scope to the realisation of this urge for freedom. Hence their movement was pre-planned. The sole motive was to remove the British from the Indian soil and establish a government of the people. It was not entirely an act of revenge for my supposed death. Of course, the rumour of my death, which was a cooked-up story had, in a large measure, caused simmering discontent in the hearts of the people at large.

The people of Talcher turned unruly after my escape from the jail. They felt restless on hearing the rumour of my death since 31st August. Schools, offices and courts in the state remained closed. The subjects did not obey the king. People shouted "Bring an end to kings rule, destroy this Government of this feudatory state. Obey Gandhiji and set up a Government of the people. Drive out British from the country." The news of the call for open revolt reached the king, who felt frightened.

The king asked the Government of India for aeroplanes, bombs and machine-guns. Government of India realised the plight of the king of Talcher, and on 3rd September sent guns, ammunitions and a

few platoons of soldiers. At about 12 noon on the 4th, fighter planes fitted with machine guns were seen flying across the skies of Talcher with a view to terrorising the people. In some places pamphlets were dropped directing people not to wage a war against their king. On occasions tear gas-shells and smoke bombs were also dropped. But, could the people of Talcher who had shown undaunted valour and courage and had suffered irreparable loss in 1938 at the time of the famous Satyagrah and Hizarat Movements, be cowed down by these fighter planes ? Government failed in frightening the people. They continued to flout laws and from 31st August, the entire administration come to a stand-still and was paralysed.

I would like to draw the attention of the readers to the 4th camp, high above the mountain. The members of Talcher Prajamandal at Angul received my letter on the 4th of September. Due to incessant rains and flood in the river, they could not turn up at the camp by the 5th evening, but they arrived on the 6th in the morning. Since the leaders from other areas and the president and treasurer of Pallahada Prajamandal, arrived, we started our consultations on the 5th itself. The meeting was convened to work out strategies for the Quit India call given by Gandhiji and adopted by the Congress party. As a first step, we planned to paralyse governments in the feudatory state and establish the government of the people, as suggested by Gandhiji. After removing the King of Talcher the victorious soldiers would be divided into three parties. One party would advance towards Dhenkanal crossing the river and a second would proceed towards Pallahada and then move towards Bamanda and Bonai. The third would be stationed at Talcher to rebuff a possible attack by the British. As time passed , more and more farmers would be trained and sent to other fudatary states. Links would be established with the people revolting against the government in other parts of Orissa. If necessary, they would be given help in the form of soldiers and arms.

This was our plan and we acted accordingly. But I was not in favour of deploying unruly people as soldiers. I was under the impression that people would have full sympathy with us and they would come forward to cooperate with us. People would have self-government which would be managed by the members of the Panchayat with the help of these soldiers. Leaders and representatives

agreed to send fifteen hundred volunteers from Pallahara and Talcher at once. Five hundred volunteers were engaged for the preparation of food for fifteen hundred volunteers. It was decided to conduct guerrilla warfare. It was also decided to launch the programme on the 15th or on the day after. Before mounting the attack, local members were called upon to arrange arms and ammunitions. In the meanwhile, from the 4th onwards, day and night, I kept an eye on war planes.

The next morning i.e. on 6th September, advisers and office-bearers of Prajamandal who included Gouri Sankar, Bichhanda Charan, Kalandi Chandra Pradhan and 6 to 7 others came to the camp. They were informed of the decisions taken on the previous day. They also promised to extend their cooperation wholeheartedly. But on 3rd September a decision had been taken at the Kumunda meeting that people would attack Talcher town and remove the government and set up a parallel government there. Word had spread in the locality and necessary arrangements had been made. People were eager to attack Talcher that very night.

I decided to restrain people and stop this move. Because I knew this unruly and disorganised mob would disperse once bombing would start from war planes. This would result in the victory of the enemy. Once the gathering was dispresed, it would be difficult to re-organise and re-settle them. Once the enemy won, they would start taking repressive measures. These would lower the spirit of the people. They would not be in a position to stand up again. Taking the above facts into consideration, I was determined not to allow them to go ahead. I stood my ground. But everone except Gouri Sankar, urged me to allow the decision to be carried out. I noticed that the atmosphere was a charged one. Anyone preventing them would be considered a coward a traitor. People would also suspect that the man was an agent of the government and would not hesitate to kill him. I got information from all parts of the state that people were armed with canes, sticks and other weapons to take part in the move. On 6th September they all expected me to take command and advise them to launch the attack. They all knew that a plane was flying overhead, it would attack them any moment with bombs. In spite of this, people wanted to go ahead with the plan. I heard that each family kept one son at home and sent the others to join the battle. Nobody was prepared to wait till the 15th of September.

When I heard that people were ready to lay down their lives, I decided to allow them to attack either on 6th night or on the 7th. But I expressed my desire to take over the command into my hands. When leaders, office bearers and volunteers knew this they all felt shocked and unhappy. They did not want me to come out into the open, because the Government would arrest me and even kill me. By the time the government declared that five thousand rupees, five hundred acres of land and five villages would be given as reward to any one who would supply clue leading to my arrest or whosoever would behead me and produce my severed head before the rulers. A title would also be conferred on that person.

Spies of the king prowled around; they mingled with the people and volunteered to collect information. Leaders thought that if I got arrested or killed it would be an irreparable loss to Talcher. Their arguments were convincing. If people knew I was alive, it would be a source of inspiration to them. They would be attracted towards me and would be distracted from other goals. They were unruly as it is. They would not be in a position to face the bombing. So, the leaders urged me not to go to the battlefield but to employ my colleagues to lead the attack.

I also saw merit in these arguments. These were also persuasive from a psychological angle. In fact, if the people knew that I was alive, their desire for revenge would be less intense. There was also the possibility that I might get caught. If I was caught or killed, people would lose their zeal. They would certainly be cowed down by the repressive methods adopted by the government. In future, the movement would be abandoned half-way through and it could not be organised in Orissa. So I decided not to go to the battlefield that night or on the next. I gave orders to attack the Talcher fort. I also made them understand Gandhiji's idea of Ramarajya. This plan was carried out in every village. .

*Mukti Pathe Sainika.* Dhenkanal / New Delhi: M.P., 1941. Rpt 1979

# Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining

**Gouranga Chandra Mohanty**
Translated by Supriya Kar

LIFE in the jail is a strange experience, which unsettles a person and leaves him dazed. It exerts unbearable pressure on his thoughts and perceptions. It bears no relation to life in the world outside. A man's reason and judgment also get distorted if he is made to live in a confined space day after day. His natural good sense and normal feelings get destroyed, and gradually he sinks to the level of an animal. But a distinct kind of ideal and a distinct purpose animated us and saved us from such mental degeneration.

In prison, we were labeled political prisoners. Food was served to us before it got dark. When we finished eating our meals, we would be herded into a room, one by one. A lantern hung from the roof, out of our reach. We would be let out at daybreak. We would spend entire nights huddled in a cell like cattle in a cowshed. The warder of the jail, standing outside the cell, would announce loudly the number of prisoners occupying a cell and that the lantern and other such articles were in a proper condition. The noise of the announcement disturbed our sleep at night.

**The Dress Code**

We wore half pants and sleeveless shirts made from a special fabric. Food was served to each of us on two iron platters. These were also manufactured specially for use in prisons. We had to use one of these for carrying water to the latrines. Again, one needed special training to use this platter in a latrine. The amount of water might be insufficient for doing our ablutions, but we had to clean the latrine with the water we carried in.

A special manual was followed in the jail. It contained specific rules regarding food to be served to the prisoners. But the jail staff, violating the rules, pocketed a part of the amount earmarked for this

purpose. As a result, food of low quality was served to us. It was extremely difficult to swallow this food, let alone survive on it.

Inside the jail, we were robbed of all our liberty. Taking *khaini* was strictly prohibited. But the Bihari prisoners would by some means or the other manage to get a little of the stuff. If anyone objected to or complained about the food or other such things, he had to undergo severe punishment. He would be thrown into an extremely small and isolated cell. If he objected vehemently, his hands and legs would be fettered. If he still continued to protest, lathis and bullets were used. This would lead to someone being wounded critically or killed. The outside world remained unaware of all this. In my opinion, prison is nothing but hell.

Sometimes we would be given such food that we felt compelled to throw it away without even touching it. To describe the suffering, the hardships and the torture we went through would fill a large volume.

**Divide and Rule**

The prisoners were divided into different categories such as prisoners undergoing simple imprisonment, and security prisoners. Prisoners belonging to these categories were kept apart from others. The British government applied its policy of Divide and Rule even in its prisons. Here I have but given a hint of the desolation and hardship endured in jails. In reality, unspeakable pain and torture oppressed us. Political prisoners like us would try to solace ourselves thinking about the painful prison life Lord Sri Krishna's parents had endured while in jail. The Lord himself had taken birth inside a prison cell. For ages, people have suffered in jails; they will do so in future.

Freedom is heavenly bliss
And slavery, boundless grief.

If this is true, it should also be kept mind that to get imprisoned while fighting to free one's country is no great sacrifice despite the suffering and pain one undergoes in prisons.

Again, amidst the unendurable humiliation and torture, there was something that brought us consolation. An English proverb says that

every black cloud has a silver lining. Among the prisoners, some were extremely learned, wise and were experts on political and social issues. Ordinary political prisoners got an opportunity to learn from them and develop their powers of analysis. Prisoners discovered a way of keeping each other sane. Regular classes were held. Arrangements were made to spread knowledge among prisoners by regularly organising discussions on various topics.

*Swadhinata Pathe Sangrami.* Bhadrak: Sahitya Bharati, 1988.

# A Turning Point in My Life

**Gokul Mohan Raychudamani**
Translated by B.C. Dwivedy

IT was July. I was staying at my uncle's house. One evening I set out to join the struggle for freedom taking with me two *dhotis* and two shirts. I recall I attended a meeting on the bank of river Kathajodi, where, after Rajakrishna Bose delivered a rousing speech, everyone was called upon to discard their foreign clothes and burn them. The audience took off mill-made clothes and piled them up. The president of the meeting set these on fire. I also threw my clothes into that fire and came back home with only the shirt on my back. This was a turning point in my life. I reached the Swaraj Ashram, from where I was sent to Balasore in the company of Gokulananda Mohanty. An agitation against taxation was going on there. I was given the charge of leading this movement.

I went to a village and stayed in the Congress office, which was housed in the Bhagbat room built on a raised platform. Many other Congress workers were also staying there. On my arrival there, I started discussions with the village-chief and some other people. All the villagers including women and children participated in the movement. They fed me, taking turns. From here news about the progress of the movement was cyclostyled and sent to different places. In a general meeting it was decided that no one would pay taxes. Now Government started taking punitive action against the villagers. It was not possible at first for the police to cross over the barricades raised by people around the village. But one day, due to heavy rain they managed to enter the village. They arrested me and some of my companions. After a trial, I was sentenced six months' imprisonment. I was sent to Balasore jail as a class three prisoner.

### My First Days in Prison

Due to a gradual increase in the number of Satyagrahis in the jail there was an acute problem of accommodation. We were put up in an

abandoned godown, which had a tin roof. It was also overcrowded as the number of prisoners accommodated there was almost double its real capacity. Tormenting the Satyagrahis in this manner was a usual practice. Many of them were injured; their bones were broken in their scuffle with the police. I was beaten by the police here; my ribs broke and that injury continues to give me pain even now.

In the jail, each one of us was provided with two underpants, specially meant for prisoners, two half-sleeved shirts and a towel; two all-season mats to be used as a bed and two blankets; two iron bowls as utensils, one for holding water and the other for eating food. We had to wash these bowls ourselves by srubbing them with bricks. Rotten foul-smelling coarse rice, tasteless watery dal, a spoonful of curry made of arum leaves and pumpkins and a little tamarind pickle was our usual diet, which we had to eat before evening when we were locked up in the prison ward after the head count. Inside the chamber there would be a dimly burning lantern. A few chose to eat rice and a few others chapati, which was also prepared from a type of coarse flour and looked like a patch of grass. We were made to put in hard physical labour. We were engaged in beating the coconut fibre. One day, we Satyagrahis complained against various punishments inflicted upon us and refused to do any work. As a result, we were given underpants made of coarse sack to wear and we were kept chained the whole day. We were served a type of tasteless porridge. We were put into the prison cells for fifteen days at a stretch. Meeting relatives and acquaintances was prohibited. Correspondence with home was also not permitted. It was a regular feature not only in the Balasore jail but also in the jails of Puri and Berhampur, where I was lodged subsequently. The treatment meted out to us was worse than the treatment meted towards other prisoners. We were hardly treated as political activists. There was no limit to the torture inflicted on us.

Every Monday, the Jail Superintendent came to see the prisoners. All of them were made to wear clean dresses and to stand in a queue with their belongings placed before them for inspection. The Superintendent was preceded by two warders and followed by two jailors and other officers during the inspection. A special type of umbrella was held high above his head. A big trumpet was blown as soon as he stepped into the jail compound. Meanwhile, the prisoners

were made to stand to attention. This used to be the usual practice in the jail.

Once we refused to stand in a queue during an inspection. This was considered an act of disobedience, and as a result, we received punishment. I had disobeyed the order of the Sahib many times. These orders were often humiliating. Besides these, the quantity of food specified in the jail manual was never served to us. The officials were involved in a sort of hoarding. The amount hoarded by them might be more than half of the total amount of food meant for us. The supplier of the food stuff used to charge high prices for low quality stuff. No one in the jail paid any heed to our complaints; rather, they rebuked us. As a result, dissatisfaction against the jail authorities grew and complaints were frequently made. They engaged the criminals lodged in the jail to assault us. We got injured in the scuffle with them. Soon the siren would ring and the reserve police force would enter the jail and knock us senseless by hitting us with the butt of their rifles. The freedom fighters had to undergo such intolerable treatment. I had had this sort of experience in the prime of my youth.

**Salt Satyagraha**

It had been decided that the Salt Law would be broken at Soran, a place beside Chilika lake in the district of Puri. I had been released from the jail recently and was entrusted with this responsibility. I first reached Kuhudi, a place under the jurisdiction of the Tangi police station. After a discussion with some young gentlemen of the village, one of them, namely Sadhu babu made arrangements forputting me up at his own residence. In spite of his poverty, he offered this service to me for quite a long time. I arranged meetings, addressed people and tried to inspire them to take part in the Satyagraha. I also started collecting rice and money from the people to support myself. The villagers took an active interest in my work and gladly offered me food. Before the appointed day, I went to Soran and camped at the Jagannath temple. A few other Satyagrahis came from Puri and joined me. We cooked food, ate our meals and hung our utensils on a tree. The police usually came and broke our utensils and this made us go without food. Seeing this, some women of the village offered to feed us. It was arranged that they would make a peculiar shrill noise at

their backyard as if they were calling their dogs at a particular time every day. Getting the signal we would stealthily enter the backyard, eat our food from the earthen pots and on leaves and slip away. The village chowkidar had a soft corner for us and that was why he did not inform the police about this secret arrangement.

A few days passed playing this game of hide and seek with the police. Two persons namely, Mangaraj of Soran and Raghu of Kuhudi assisted us. On the appointed day, thousands of people joined us, Indian National Congress flags in hand, and marched in a procession to the shore of Chilika. Conches were blown and women ullulated. People started collecting salt, while the police initially stood as silent spectators. After three to four days, we got the news that the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had been signed. We were given a grand farewell in a meeting at Kuhudi, which was attended by a large number of people. Houses were decorated with lamps. The victory of the Salt Satyagrah was celebrated. The next day, we went back to Puri.

**Conference of the Congress Party**

The office of the Congress Committee in Puri was then situated in Ramchandi Lane, where Laxmi Talkies stands at present. Contributing our own labour, we had built a mud house with thatched-roof to serve as our office beside the brick-house which was already there. Saint Ram Das, who worked for the Congress, was living there. Later, many Congress workers settled there.

It was decided that the All India Congress Committee Conference would be held at Baliapanda in Puri town. Pandit Nilakantha Das was the President of the reception committee. Harekrushna Mahtab was the Chairman of the volunteers' organisation. A training centre was opened at Cuttack to train volunteers drawn from different parts of Orissa. A teacher from Seba Dal was invited. Leaders like Nabakrushna Choudhuri, Malati Devi, Rajkrishna Bose and others joined this training camp. I and Gati Krushna Swain were sent to represent Puri district in the training camp. After I returned from there, I was appointed Secretary to Mahtab, who was heading reception committee. Another training camp was set up at Rahasbari Math, Nimapara. I was sent there as an instructor.

News reached us that Mahatma Gandhi and many other leaders had been arrested and the party had been declared illegal. I closed

the training camp and went back to the Congress office at Puri. The next day, the police seized the office and arrested us during the night. I was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. I was shifted from Puri to Gaya jail and after a few days to Hazaribag and finally to Patna.

**My Days in Patna Jail**

A camp jail had been built on a spacious piece of lowland near Phulwari railway station some distance from Patna, exclusively for Class-III prisoners of Bihar and Orissa, who took part in the movement . The entire area was fenced off with electrically charged barbed wire. Inside, there were houses made of tin walls and thatched roofs. Each house stood in isolation and had only one gate. The jail was guarded closely. Electricity and water were supplied to the prisoners in the camp. Out of some 4,000 prisoners who were housed there, about 700 belonged to Orissa.

When we got into the prison ward we saw that the floor inside the rooms was not flat. Ridges of farm-lands ran through them. So we had to make the floor flat putting in a lot of hard work. The walls and roofs of the wards were made of tin sheets and so the winter was unbearable. In spite of frequent complains the authority did not do anything to make things more comfortable for us. They responded only when the death toll among the Oriya prisoners alone rose to 27. Earthen walls were made just beside the tin walls and blankets were spread under the tin roofs.

What about the diet and the dress ? These were almost like what we were provided with in Puri jail. The only difference was in the type of work we were made to do: we had to grind wheat instead of beating choir. The Oriya warders employed here felt sympathy for us and so the supply of food was not meagre.

I could not bear the heat of this place and suffered from blood dysentery. I was admitted to the prison hospital, where I stayed for long 21 days. I was desperate and had given up the hope of life but narrowly escaped death. I was extremely weak and feeble, but alive.

I then occupied myself with reading books in jail. We held discussions on many subjects and celebrated the Independence day and a few festivals. We started a school for the education of our political colleagues, and arranged mass exercises in the morning. Our

colleagues eagerly joined us. Occasionally, plays having many comic scenes were staged to entertain us. Arrangements were made subsequently to make us forget the cruel torment of life in jail. The jail being far away from Orissa, there was no chance of seeing our near and dear ones. Correspondence, which was not so easy, was the only source of relief. All the letters, outgoing as well as incoming, were strictly checked and then posted or delivered to us. As a result, postal communication got delayed.

I had to serve two terms in this jail, which added up to one year. It is worth mentioning that most of those who became ministers in independent India, served terms in this jail. Common people did not have any contact with us for fear of the British Government.

It is all a part of the past now. We were released from the jail in due course. Eating *abhara* of Sri Jagannath which was given free of cost in Emar Math, we slept on the verandas of shops at night. A close watch was kept on us. In 1934, we had to do all kinds of party work including propaganda by secretly cyclostyling leaflets and distributing them.

*Raktasikta Khordha Matira Sangram.* Khurda: Kitab Mahal, 1995.

# The Quit India Movement

**Braja Kishore Dhal**
Translated by Arun Kumar Mohanty

AND then came the Quit India movement of 1942. It gave a golden opportunity to the king to take revenge on people. The leaders of the Praja Mandal and many workers of the outfit were arrested. Those who had harboured feelings of hostility towards the officials were also taken into custody. Before we could do something in response to Mahatma Gandhi's call, 'Do or die', Subahu Singh, Purna Chandra Mohapatra, Krutibas Pradhan, Narottam Das and I were detained under the Government of India Act. Several others also got arrested. Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders of the country were arrested on the 9th of August. We were arrested on the 20th.

One of our co-workers, Baishnab Patnaik went to Kamakshyanagar, organized the people of Kamakshyanagar and Parjang. As a result, twenty-one dedicated workers came forward to work in a 'do or die' spirit. They raided the police station at Kamakshyanagar and snatched away a few guns from the police. They set the police station, court and the tahasil office on fire. They broke open the king's godown in Malapura village and distributed the paddy stored there among people. Then they set fire to the outpost at Chandpur and came face to face with eighteen policemen deployed there. An encounter took place and there was an exchange of fire. However, people had no expertise in using guns. Moreover, there was heavy rain and people dispersed. Two brothers—Benu and Bira—of Toradanali fell to the bullets of the police. Baishnab Patnaik got hit in his hand and Tirtha Sahu in his thighs. Several others were also wounded. After the incident, Patnaik and Nabaghan Behera went to Jajpur by boat. Then they left for Calcutta via Cuttack. Later, Baishnab Patnaik joined the Communist Party. The other injured workers slipped into Angul and Cuttack, where they received medical treatment.

People of this feudatory state were subjected to terrible tyranny. Oppression of people, burning their houses, auctioning off their

property, collection of punitive tax and rape continued undeterred. The children and relatives of the people who had revolted became specific targets

From among the rebels of Kamakshyanagar subdivision, Ananda Chandra Swain, Anukul Sahu, Musa Malik and Baidhar Swain were taken into custody. The people of Kusia village acted as police informers. Baidhar was only twelve years old. Since he was only a boy, he was sentenced to six years imprisonment and the other three were ordered to hang till death. Padmanabh Sahu, Kulamani Pradhan, Hadibandhu Parida, Tirtha Sahu, Raghuram Dehury, Lakshman Naik, Lochan Singh, Harekrushna Sahu, Nabaghan Behera, Radhanath Bhutia and Sampati Sahu were given life terms. They made an appeal to the higher court, which upheld the judgment in the case of Musa Malik, but commuted the sentence to life term in the case of the other three. Later, to celebrate Britain's victory over Tunisia, the life of Musa Malik was spared and the sentence was commuted to life term. Late K.B. Roy of Bengal was the judge.

In 1942, acts of arson continued in Kamakshyangar and people had to face police repression. Damol was one such village, where the police subjected people to harassment. On October 18, 1942, they raided the village and tortured Ganeswar Jena, Udayanath Nayak, Bhaskar Parida, Jagannath Nayak, Bibatsha Nayak, Jayakrushna Nayak, Muralidhar Rout, Ratnakar Bhuiyan, Nakaphodi Samal, Bankanidhi Parida, Chaitana Bal, Umesh Chandra Nayak and Prabhakar Parida. Some of them were thrashed mercilessly. Men were asked to gather at a place, where they were detained while policemen raped women and snatched their ornaments. The women who got raped included a pregnant woman. They were tortured on the false pretext that the guns and cartridges snatched from the police station were found in the village. Two Harijan boys named Bauri and Adar were severely beaten on the false allegation that they had kept the cartridges. When out of fear they said that they had thrown the cartridges to river Brahmani, a hundred and twenty pairs of bullocks were made to till the sand on the riverbed. A seventy-year-old man, Lokanath Parida's arm was broken and the boatman Nakaphodi Samal got maimed for life. Paramananda, the brother of Netrananda Nayak, a Prajamandal leader, was implicated in a false case and was sent to prison. Both of

them were detained for quite a few days. A collective fine of one thousand rupees was imposed on the villagers. Since the Harijans failed to pay the fine, their lands were sold off to realize the amount. The house of Mahesh Chandra Subahusingh of Parjang was razed to the ground with the help of an elephant. The people of that village were also brutally tortured.

*Bhulibu Nahin*, Bhubaneswar: Bookland International, 1980.

# Prison as School

**Binod Kanungo**

Translated by Supriya Kar

I was arrested on 16th November 1930, and was sentenced to nine months'rigorous imprisonment. During my stay in a camp jail in Patna in Bihar, I devoted myself to reading. Most of my co-prisoners were highly educated. They took it upon themselves to teach us. I wanted to teach myself English and Hindi. One gentleman's advice proved a blessing to me. His name was Binodananda Jha. Later, he became the chief minister of Bihar and achieved a lot of fame. Some of us went to him to discuss our future. We said to him, "We have left schools, but we have no intention of giving up our studies. We are learning Hindi and English. What should we do in order to master these two languages?" What we said pleased him very much. He said that Rama Bruksha Benipuri, Gokulanda Mohanty, Jagannath Rath, would teach us English very well. He himself would teach us Hindi. While assuring us of his support, he said, "Learn English. Of course you should learn this language. But from the beginning, let this simple idea sink into your heads. Learn English in order to know a lot of things about the world. It gives you the key to the storehouse of the world's knowledge. Our knowledge would grow if we read books written in English. We can enrich our own language and literature with the help of this knowledge. We would write books in Indian languages for millions of our own countrymen who will never get the opportunity to learn English. To do so we must be able to understand the English language very well. This should suffice for the time being. We need not lose sleep over how to speak English fluently or to write it properly. That some would look upon you as fools if you fail to speak English with a good accent should not bother you in the least. The English language has such a rich vocabulary that, if we don't have a thorough knowledge of it, we won't be able to understand most of the books written in it. The prisoners have many books with

them in the jail. Go through them. Seek the help of others whenever you find it difficult to make sense of something. Gradually, you will acquire a command over English." Ganga Sarana Singh also gave us the same advice. I found what they said very convincing. Understanding English was more important than writing, speaking or pronouncing it although ideally one should master all these skills. As for me, I would not have any time for these, for I would have so many things to do after I got out of the prison.

Conflicts between the prisoners and jail authorities occurred regularly in the camp jail. We also had heated arguments among ourselves over questions such as" Who is greater –Krishna or Rama" or "Who is more progressive?" or "Who is a moderate?" Sometimes personal quarrels broke out over trivial matters. However, our studies went on in the midst of all this. Someone suggested, "One may read whatever one likes individually, but certain things should be read collectively". Someone possessed a copy of Marxim Gorky's *The Mother*. The spread of communism in Russia around the years 1920-1921 had left a deep impact on the progressive intelligentsia in India. The impact was felt strongly well into the 1930s. In *The Mother*, Gorky had described the life of the down-trodden and the dispossessed so convincingly that whoever read the novel said that they felt a shiver passing through their bodies while going through it.

A hundred of us sat together. Gokulanda Mohanty from Orissa, Rama Brukshya Benipuri from Bihar and a couple of other people described vividly how people in Russia were tyrannized by the Czars, how people rebelled against the rule of the Czars under the leadership of Lenin, and also how the writings of Tolstoy and Gorky slowly prepared the masses for the revolution. It would be an exaggeration to say that I understood every word of what they said. I understood nearly eighty percent of what was said. This was more than enough to enthuse and inspire me. The elders read, and we listened. The relevance of the topic was explained. Someone suggested, "It would be better if these young people do the reading. Besides improving their pronunciation, it will help us find out to what extent they have grasped the subject. Each one would read for fifteen minutes." When my turn came, I realized how many words I understood and how much of the subject matter made sense to me. Someone would explain how the writers used a particular word in different contexts to convey different

shades of meaning, how the writers invested the words with various new meanings. Someone once asked, "What does the word 'appreciate' mean?"

Some others and I said that the word 'appreciate' means 'to like' or 'to admire'. Another said something else. But Gokuli Babu explained, "Yes, you are right. But the word also means 'to understand'. The other day Lal Bihari babu (Pattnaik), said after receiving Rajendra Prasad's letter, "He agrees with me, he is of my opinion." I pointed out to him that he had written only, 'I have no difficulty in appreciating what you want to convey. I am thinking what could be done'. This means that he understood your words. How could you say that it implicitly meant that he certainly agreed with you or that he was of the same opinion? He got annoyed with me". This impressed me. I learnt that one must be aware of the different meanings of a word; otherwise it would be difficult for one to understand the idea a message conveys. Lal Bihari Pattnaik was an employee in the Education Department under the Madras Government. He lost his job for the crime of loving his motherland. He was now a prisoner in the camp jail in Patna. Rajendra Prasad needs no introduction. Lal Bihari babu did not approve of some of our actins in the jail. He would raise unrealistic questions of principle and get terribly angry with us. As the quarrels grew unmanageable in the jail, the Governor of Bihar and Orissa requested Rajendra babu to go to the prison and persuade us to maintain peace and help restore order in the prison. The jail authorities and the prisoners should reach some settlement so that the five thousand prisoners could live in peace. Lal Bihari babu had written a letter explaining how his co-prisoners were making unjust demands and Rajendra babu had given his views on the matter.

After we finished reading *The Mother*, JAC Abbot's *Life of Napoleon* was chosen to be read out. The educated people in India were then fascinated by Napoleon. This was because he was the enemy of Britain. Praise was lavished on his valour. How the English defeated him through deceit and how they kept him isolated in the Saint Helena island and later murdered him, were discussed. Nepoleon used to say that the word 'defeat' did not figure in his dictionary. Abbot had written that Nature has exhausted all her energies in creating Bonaparte. In later years, I realized that the statement was sheer exaggeration; but at that time I had committed it to memory. Nearly two hundred and

fifty young people used to sit together to read a book. Reading was one of the tasks to be performed at school, but I had never had the experience of reading continuously for two hours there and getting scolded if I committed a minor mistake.

I learnt to read Hindi while in this jail. I also learnt to recognize the Devanagari script. It intrigued most of the Biharis how Sanskrit was being taught in schools in Orissa without using the Devanagari script. They felt amused when they came to know that we read and write Sanskrit using the Oriya alphabet. Though I read Hindi, I lay greater emphasis on learning English. I was invited to a seminar which was organized by the National Book Trust of India on behalf of Government of India in 1986. The theme of the seminar was the 'National Book Law'. All India Hindi Publishers' Union had hosted a dinner in our honour. Kanti Choudhury and myself had spoken on behalf of the delegates before dinner. Probably Choudhury did not know Hindi well. He finished his speech after saying eight to ten sentences. Everybody enjoyed it when I narrated how and in what circumstances and from whom I had learnt Hindi. Whatever I had acquired then, remains my only capital.

The discussion on economics and history would go on for hours. We were told how the British became the rulers of India and how systematically they started exploiting our country. This exploitation broke the back of our economy. The economy collapsed as it could not bear the burden of exploitation. The textbooks for schools and colleges were written by distorting the real history. History was written in such a way that it instilled an inferiority complex in our minds. It sought to show how the culture and traditions of the western world were greater and better than those of ours. The people of our country were forced to believe that those who could write such things in an impressive manner in colleges, were better educated. Indians were made to learn English in a manner which led them to believe that vernacular Indian languages were undeveloped and incapable of expressing emotions as they did not have the necessary resources. Till the time of Tilak, Gandhi and Tagore, educated Indians believed that the fundamental theories of science could not be explained through vernacular languages; they did not have the resources to explain even matters relating to politics and economics.

These discussions went on for hours and we all sat listening. In

between we were asked what we made of these. A test was conducted to decide who spoke well. The prisoners possessed a large number of books. We prepared ourselves for these meetings by reading the books. This preparation benefited me immensely. I learnt great many things, besides language. The more I learnt the longing to know more grew intenser within me. I was filled with a strange kind of happiness.

Around thirty-six Sundays were to be deducted from nine months' sentence. All the time left could be devoted to study and much knowledge could be acquired – knowledge which could not be obtained from two years' study at a school or a college. This was my calculation, and accordingly I drew up a time table. But towards the end of February 1930, we heard that we might be released in a few days' time. The British Government was willing to transfer limited powers to Indians, and they would convene a Round Table Conference in London and call Indian leaders, and a plan would be prepared on the basis of their views. Gandhi and thousands of Congress workers would be in jail while the discussion would take place at the Round Table Conference.

Those who had no roots among the people of the country were invited to this conference. They would agree to everything that the government proposed. They were called 'Yes, Sir' people. It was rightly said that noone was a representative of the people in the true sense of the term except Ambedkar and Mohd. Ali Jinha. Eminent lawyers, landlords, kings did matter to some extent, but they were in no sense of the term the representatives of any section of the Indian people. After holding discussions for a few days at the Conference, the British Government as well as most of the representatives who had gone there realized that, if Gandhi would not be invited, and through him the Congress, whatever decisions might be taken at the Conference would have no meaning because these would never satisfy the Indian masses and the agitation would continue. As a result, the Governor General of India and Gandhi signed a temporary truce which would enable Gandhi to go to Britain to attend the Round Table conference at London. One of the clauses in the truce was that all freedom fighters would be released from jail. Accordingly, we all got released from jail in March 1931.

***Patha Pachhe Pachhe Apathua, Bhubaneswar: Basundara prakashani, 1987.***

## School Days

**Sachi Rautray**

Translated by Arun Kumar Mohanty

NATIONALISTIC feelings were running high among the students of our school. One night the national flag was unfurled on the roof of the school building. In the morning, people got up and found the tricolour flying on the rooftop. From his residence, which was close to the school building, the Headmaster could see the flag, and its very sight made him seethe in anger. He ordered the daftary, Kulia to remove the flag and then went to school. A charge was framed against my friends, Nrusingha and Braja, and they were rusticated from the school. Nrusingha belonged to Banpur, who later became a Member of the Parliament. I was spared on that occasion. However, I had to leave the school afterwards.

My name was struck off from the register because I had not paid school fees for two consecutive months. I had received money from my parents on time; since I had not gone to school for long, fine at the rate of one anna per day was imposed on me. No one in our family knew that I had stayed away from school for so long and that a fine had been imposed on me. Braja babu, the clerk of the school, told of this to my uncle, whom he ran into in the cutcherry. Uncle told my parents about it. This caused turmoil in our house. Mother got very angry and scolded me. She as well as others in the family thought that I had squandered the money away. But I had kept the amount in a wooden chest in our house. When the chest was opened, all the money was found. I had not spent even a paisa. On many occasions, on the pretext of going to school, I actually went to the Saraswati temple in the Paltan field, which a Marwari gentleman had built, or spent time in the Congress camp.

The next day, my mother gave me money to pay the fees and the fine, which I deposited in the school. After this, I began attending classes. However, the story was repeated after a few months. My

name was again struck off the register, because I failed to deposit school fees. However, this time the headmaster did not allow me to deposit the amount and get myself readmitted. Although it was a common practice to allow students to get themselves readmitted by paying the fees along with the fine, an exception was made in my case. I was then in Class XI, the final year of Matriculation. The headmaster was always looking for an excuse to disallow me to continue in the school. But he had not found sufficient reasons to rusticate me as he did in the case of my friends, Nrusingha and Braja. Now at last an opportunity to do so presented itself to him.

*Uttara Kaksha*, Cuttack: Grantha Mandir, 1998.

# Gandhiji, Our Commander–in–Chief

**Surendra Nath Dwivedi**
Translated by Mrutyunjay Sarangi

AROUND 1940 I was the Secretary of the Cuttack District Congress Committee. Prior to that, in 1938, I had become a member of the All India Congress Committee. When the Independent Socialist Party was formed in 1948, I could not continue as a member of the AICC. However, during the Satyagraha movement of 1940, I was a full-fledged activist of the Congress party. The All India Congress Committee gave full powers to Gandhiji to lead the movement. We had to follow the All India Congress Committee's directions.

It was decided not to render any help to the British in its war efforts. But it was left entirely to Gandhiji to decide what sort of struggle was to be launched and whether we should go for an all-out fight with the British.

A lot of debate was going on about whether this was the appropriate time to begin a real fight against the British. On one side we had Hitler's, Fascism – on the other, the British. Neither the Congress nor Gandhiji wanted to extend support any of the two. At the same time, the desire to bring a quick end to the British rule was getting stronger. A direct fight with British administration would make it totter, and a weakened administration would mean indirectly helping the Hitler side. Our policy of non-cooperation with the war efforts was applicable both to the British as well as to Germany and Japan. The communists and some other political forces were condemning Gandhiji as a Fascist. This was a meaningless allegation. They were adopting this anti-national stand due to a lack of feelings of loyalty to their motherland. All their actions were dictated by Soviet Russia and were influenced by the national interests of that country. How baseless such allegations of the communists were became clear during the next phase of the struggle for Indian independence. When the final phase of the fight with British imperialism began in 1942, the communists

did not lend their support to the Indian cause. On the other hand, under the direction of Soviet Russia, whose interests they wanted to protect, they took the side of British imperialists.

All this has now become history. Yet, when we write about our struggle for independence and our imprisonment, it would be appropriate to talk about the objectives of the struggle.

To call Gandhiji a Fascist was grossly unfair. In a war the commander-in-chief employs many strategies. He may take one stand in the public, but the directions he gives to soldiers may be different. No one disapproves of such dual tactics in a war. Soldiers can always appreciate such tactics : they can guess these from the hints given or from particular types of action. However, Gandhiji's strategy was one of direct rebellion. He did not want to hide anything from the public.

Let me narrate one particular incident. I had gone to meet Gandhiji to seek his advice. The Japanese had sunk a British merchant ship in the Bay of Bengal near the shores of Kujanga in Cuttack district. The ship was smashed to pieces. The merchandise came floating to the shore. This was grabbed by the people and started appearing in the market. Noone knew from such a long distance how the Japanese submarine came so stealthily and sank a British ship. There was excitement everywhere, panic spread – not among the public, but in the minds of British rulers. Everyone thought that a Japanese attack was imminent, and it would start from the shores of Orissa. Out of panic, the British shifted the secretariat from Cuttack to Sambalpur. Gradually, the general public got infected by the panic after seeing the disquiet among their British rulers. Many people left the Cuttack town and headed towards villages. It was a tricky situation – and people were left utterly perplexed. The garhjat kings, who were like pet dogs of the British , also started getting panicky. In case British rule came to an end, who would help them? Many of them started making preparations. They got ready to show the white flag of peace when the Japanese came to surrender to them.

We were getting worried. What will happen to us? What stand will Congress take? Will the Congress side with the Japanese at this hour of crisis and achieve the aim of driving out the British with their help? Netaji Subhas had already stated clearly, "The enemy of the

British is our enemy," He had already escaped from the clutches of the British while being held a prisoner by them. Who will blame us if we adopt the same strategy and try to throw the British out with Japanese help? We the Congressmen of Orissa were deeply disturbed by such confusing thoughts. We therefore decided to seek Gandhiji's advice. I was at that time the Editor of United Press. Its office was in my residence at Telenga Bazaar. It was decided that no one would suspect me, if I went to consult Gandhiji and seek his advice. For me, this was to be my first political meeting with Gandhiji. I left for Nagpur by train from Sambalpur. From there I went by bus to Sewagram, in case anyone suspected and arrested me if I took a train to Sevagram. I have narrated in detail my meeting with Gandhiji on that occasion in my book *August Biplab*.

So we were in a dilemma. What to do? Gandhiji's direction was clear – "Opt only for non-violent resistance! Face Japanese bullets! Fly our tricolour! Tell the Japanese that our fight aims at driving away the Biritsh. But we will not welcome you either. You, too, should leave! We will run our country, only our flag should fly here. We will never surrender. The Fascist forces are as much our enemy as the imperialist forces. If any Congressman is scared, send him to me. I will give him shelter at Sevagram."

There was no confusion in Gandhiji's message. It was our rare privilege to wage the fight for independence under such a commander–in–chief. Our countrymen have achieved independence under his leadership. The core theme of the non-violent struggle was: scaring the British Empire through civil disobedience, even if it leads to imprisonment and many other sacrifices.

"Gandhiji Amar Senapati" from *Kara Anubhuti*, Cuttack : Orissa Book Store, 1997.

# The Middle Path

**Shradhakar Supakar**

Translated by Mary Mohanty

IN 1930 Mahatma Gandhi again gave a call for a mass movement. He decided to disobey British laws by launching a Satyagraha. In those days, salt was being imported to India from England. Making salt from seawater was a punishable offence. Salt is the most precious gift of nature to man and no one — men, birds or animals – can live without it. Describing the imposition of the salt law as unjust, Gandhi decided to launch a movement against it. He planned to begin his historic march on foot on the 12th of March 1930 from Dandi to the seashore and make salt at Dharshana on 9th April the same year. Thus, the twelfth of March 1930 came to be looked upon as a red-letter day. The civil disobedience movement was to be launched from this day. A new phase of the mass movement against foreign rule would begin.

People all over India were called upon to observe this day. At the time, we were students of eleventh class. We too decided to go on a strike on this day, that is, to stay away from school. A meeting of the eleventh class students was held on the Budharaja hill after school hours on the eleventh of March. We decided not to go to school the next day.

On the twelfth, all the students of the eleventh class except one or two stayed away from school. Those students among us, whose parents did not approve of our decision, were asked to come near the residence of Sri Taraprasad Mishra and to stay there throughout the midday. Many of us remained present there from 11 A.M. that day. Around 1 PM we received information that the children of a few government employees had told the headmaster of our meeting and the decision we had taken the day before. As a result, names of almost all the students of the eleventh class were struck off the school register. That day, many guardians went round looking for their

wards. Had they found us out, they would have dragged us back to school and our names would not have been struck off the register. But we stayed there till school hours were over.

This action on our part was quite unexpected. Until this time, Sambalpur town had never witnessed a mass movement. Needless to say, I myself was an important leader of this agitation. My father did not feel annoyed with me. But important people in the town thought that their children should be readmitted to school , as the action taken by only a few students had not received any public support. So, after a few days, we were re-admitted into the school and our lessons continued as usual. All of us who had joined the strike were good students; so the question of the school authorities either objecting to or preventing our taking re-admission did not arise.

Now-a-days, strikes in schools and colleges have become commonplace and they go on for months. Students have so many grievances. People and students have become accustomed to students'strikes. But, in those days, news of students' strike were published in newspapers in columns carrying bold headlines. As a result, many guardians got annoyed with students, especially with leaders like us. This kind of behaviour on our part might have exasperated many conservative guardians, particularly because we were the students of the highest class in the school and we had to appear at the matriculation examination the same year. As there was no college in Sambalpur at the time, studies of many students came to an end after passing this examination.

In February 1931, I sat for the matriculation examination. My results were not up to my expectations. I could not get full marks in the mathematics paper on account of a silly mistake I had committed. Though I had hoped to secure the highest marks in Sanskrit, I got fewer marks than my classmates, perhaps because I used too many difficult words. All the same, that year, the results of Sambalpur Zilla School were far better than those of the previous year and the next year. Having secured the fifth place among the students of Bihar and Orissa, I won a provincial scholarship of twenty rupees per month. Securing the position next to mine, Rajaram got a scholarship amounting to fifteen rupees a month, the first such

scholarship to be awarded by the Orissa Division. Sashibhusan stood third in the school and got a district scholarship of ten rupees a month; and, being placed in the first and second class respectively, Taraprasad and Satyagopal received merit scholarships of twenty-five rupees to be received once every three months.

Towards the end of 1930 and in 1931 Satyagraha and the civil disobedience movement had entered a critical phase. The Satyagraha continued in coastal areas. In regions far away from the coast, agitation for non-payment of tax, picketing in front of liquor shops went on.

I sat idle after taking the matriculation examination. I was an ardent supporter of the Congress. Advised by a few renowned Congress workers in Sambalpur, I set out for picketing liquor shops. Another boy of my age, Sri Ramachandra Panda, also accompanied me. Father did not object to my decision, nor did he discourage me from engaging myself in this kind of activity. For a few days, we went to picket in front of a big liquor den located in the middle of the big bazaar at Khetarajpur. We stood in front of the liquor shop from five in the evening to eight o'clock at night and requested people who came there not to take alcohol. Many day-labourers, who slogged all day long carrying loads in the station in Kshetrajpur, came to the liquor den at night in order to find a little relief. We advised them not to waste their hard-earned money on liquor and to think about the well-being of their wives and children. Many did not pay any heed to our advice and walked into the liquor den. We were young boys, after all. It was only to be expected that our advice would be ignored. But some people went away from the den, following our advice. Those who hailed from decent families and were habituated to drinking felt ashamed and did not visit the liquor den ever again.

The contractor of the den was a Parsi. He had been staying at a rented house at our Jhaduapara, where we lived, for some years. So he did not want to take any stringent action against us. But his business suffered. So he argued with us. He said to us many things on behalf of labourers. He also mildly rebuked us. Finally, after a few days hethrew out a challenge saying, "You are picketing here for you face no risks. Go to the den of the Muslim contractor at

Kumbharapara and picket there for a few days. There you will get the real taste of picketing."

We accepted his challenge. From next day, we picketed the den at Kumbharapara. The Muslim contractor was a fierce opponent of the Congress. He was prepared to take appropriate measures against us. On the first day he advised us against picketing. On the second, we received the news that we would be arrested. The same day, after evening, one eminent person, who was a Municipality councillor, came to us, dashed an empty bottle on the ground and said, "Why are you snatching away bottles?" Then he went to the Sadar police station and filed a report against us. The police came, arrested both of us, took us to the police station and threw us into the lock-up.My father went to the police station around 11 P.M. and brought us out on bail.

Criminal proceedings under section 426 of IPC were initiated against us. Usually, Sri Chandrashekhar Behera defended the accused in cases involving satyagrahis. He and Sri Bhagirathi Mishra acted as our defence lawyers.

I was then aged only sixteen. I was a minor. A minor could not be punished for his offence. But it would be convenient if it could be proved that I was above eighteen. So, the civil surgeon in Sambalpur examined me, and issued a certificate to the effect that I was a little older than eighteen.

At that time I was a stranger to the world of lies. My adolescent eyes were slowly opening to the relative importance of truths and lies in the real world.

One Muslim deposed as the chief witness from the prosecution side. His position as a councillor in the Municipality would normally lead us expect him to be honest. But, what he said as a witness was a complete lie; because, even in our dreams, we had never imagined snatching a bottle of liquor from anyone and throwing it away. Anyway, in such a case, it was really hard to prove a witness a liar through interrogation. Sri Bhagirathi Mishra interrogated the witness from our side. But he could not disprove what the witness had said.

Perhaps, at the time, the British government had issued a special ordinance to suppress picketing. The truth or otherwise of our case

did not matter very much to the judge. Had this case been a political one, we would have been made to pay a fine for breaking a cheap article like a bottle. But our action had something to do with the movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. So, showing leniency to us was out of the question.

Many of our well-wishers were troubled by the thought that, if I would be jailed, my excellence at my studies would come to nothing. My wife's grandfather, Raisaheb Shyamasundar Panda, had left this mortal world a year before. Now, the chief among my well-wishers was my father's younger brother, Pradyumna Supakar. At that time, he was the Vice-Chairman of Sambalpur Muncipality and Chandrashekhar Behera was the Chairman. Father's younger brother was as opposed to the Congress as father was devoted to it. He was awarded the title 'Raisaheb' for his work in the field of public welfare. He and Sri Gokul Chandra Baboo, the chairman of the District Council, consulted our lawyer Sri Chandra Shekhar Behera and got father to agree to write a letter of apology on our behalf. At that time, Sri Nilamani Senapati was the Deputy Commissioner of Sambalpur.. They consulted Sri Senapati regarding the letter of apology and mitigation of our punishment.

I was not in Sambalpur when this consultation took place. At that time I and my friends had gone to our village to have a picnic after our examination. There I heard that such a plan was being considered, and I was asked to come back to Sambalpur. The next day, I returned to Sambalpur and signed the letter of apology in the presence of my elders. Ramachandra Panda also signed it. We would have been jailed for three weeks, but we were exempted from punishment as we were very young and as we submitted the letter of apology.

I deeply regretted this action at that time and also later in life. Satyagraha is a stringent test, indeed. It is hard to imagine what dreadful religious crisis Yudhistira must have faced when he had to tell a lie. Compelled to face the truth, I lost my nerve and buckled under pressure. To counter the lie of the civil surgeon and the municipality councilor through another lie amounted to violating sacred religious principles. This incident changed the course of my life decisively.

If I had been the son of a person having a salaried job or someone who was loyal to the British government, I would have remained aloof from the movement for I was good at my studies, and I would have tried to join the ICS, which was the dream of every good student those days. Had I been a dedicated follower of Swadeshi, I would have gone to jail for three weeks and, later on, giving up my studies, I would have become a leader in the freedom struggle. But I chose the middle path. When my career suffered this setback, I vowed that I would never try to find a salaried job and would make my living by taking up some independent profession.

*Madhyama Purusha*. Cuttack: Lekhak Sahayoga Samiti, 1982.

# The Hanging of Lakshman Naik

**Manmohan Choudhuri**
Translated by Aurobindo Behera

LAKSHMAN Naik of Koraput was lodged in a cell in Berhampur jail meant for prisoners serving life sentences. Such prisoners were kept confined in solitary cells all day long. Food was served to them in the cell. They were taken out for bath under the strict supervision of the warder.

An appeal in the High Court, and subsequently a mercy petition had been filed to spare the life of Lakshman Naik. But the petitions had not been pursued properly. There was no commutation of the death penalty. The mercy petition also did not yield any results. The date for hanging was fixed. The day before, the jailor himself had got the wards searched to make sure no weapons had been stored. Even carpenter's tools were taken away. The roll call of the convicts had been suspended for the night. In other words, the wards were kept locked. Sleep naturally eluded the prisoners. It was a night of terror. We were to be mute witnesses to the cold-blooded murder of one of our compatriots by so-called civilized people. The very thought was revolting. We were oppressed by a feeling of despondency. It was a moment when we realised how violence had got the country in its stranglehold.

The thought of rising in revolt must have occurred to some. Later, at a workers' meeting, my uncle, Sri Nabakrushna Choudhuri, said in a choked voice that we were cowards, that we should have made all efforts to save the life of Lakshman Naik even at the cost of our own lives. Maybe, such an effort would have gone in vain, but it would have been the intense expression of a protest, of anguish. Along with the life of Laxman Naik, a few more lives would have been sacrificed. But this would have remained a shining example of idealism and inspiration for future generations. This did not happen. Suppressing their anger and emotion many people resolved that day

to put an end to British rule that had taken the life of Lakshman Naik. Lenin's elder brother was executed for attempting to assassinate the Tsar. However, Lenin did not lay down his ownlife in a symbolic protest. Rather, he resolved to lay the foundations of a new society by putting an end to the Tsarist rule. He succeeded in his mission to a great extent.

But how long did the memory of this black night remain in our minds? How long did the resolve last? We achieved independence. From among the witnesses of that black night emerged people who did not hesitate to suck the blood of the very people whom Lakshman Naik represented. Ramanathan, who had passed the death sentence against Lakshman Naik without basing his verdict on reliable and sufficient evidence, became a great favourite of the Congress Government. Congress leaders made him an instrument of their corrupt practices taking full advantage of his vulnerability.

The previous day Lakshman Naik had wished to meet Sadasiv Babu. The latter was taken to him. Laxman Naik said, "My dear friend, I am going, But will Swaraj ever be a reality ? Will people enjoy peace and prosperity?" Sadasiv Babu replied in a choked voice, "We will surely realise our goal. There is no doubt about it". Naik said, "Victory to Mahatma Gandhi."

The night passed; all kinds of evil thoughts crowded our minds. Sleep was being disturbed again and again. The appointed moment was approaching fast. The hanging would take place early in the morning at about four o' clock. After giving him a bath and tying both his hands behind, four warders would almost rush him to the gallows. The iron frame of the gallows would loom like the goal post of a football field. One end of the hangman's rope would be firmly tied to an iron ring. At the other end would be the noose. Till now, the rope was safely kept in an exclusive chest of the jailor. It would be made softened with fat and the pulp of ripe banana. Details such as what would be the strength and length of the rope have been specified in the jail manual. The height and weight of the convict are taken into account with the help of very exact mathematical calculations. The rope would be tied to the gallows according to these calculations. A day prior to the hanging, a rehearsal of the event would be carried out using a sandbag of the same weight as the convict's.

Under the iron frame of the gallows there is a deep hole. It is covered with two collapsible iron plates fixed with hinges. The edges of the plates are placed on an iron angle attached to a handle. Once the lever is pulled, the angle would give way and the iron plates would collapse. There are arrangements, which enable the authorities to hang two convicts at a time. For this purpose, two ropes could be tied to the crossbeam. Once seven convicts had been hanged on a single day, two at a time, in the Cuttack jail. The scientific experts had devised methods to ensure that less of the valuable time of the highly paid government officials would be wasted whenever a large number of persons had to be executed.

They would make Lakshman Naik stand on one of the iron plates. His two legs would be tied firmly. His head would be covered with a blue or black hood. The place would be crowded with high officials like the district magistrate, the police superintendent, the civil surgeon, the jail superintendent, besides the jailor, two outside witnesses, the jail doctor, sepoys, warders and zamadars. It would appear as though the face of the convict was covered with a hood to spare the officers the repulsive sight, which might hurt their 'civilised' sensibilities. The mask was meant to cover their 'decency' as it were. After wearing the hood, Lakshman Naik would turn into an inert and faceless sandbag, so that when he would be executed, the civilized gentlemen would be spared a painful experience.

Next the neck of Lakshman Naik would be placed in the noose and his hands would be firmly tied. The jail manual gives all the procedural details: to which side the knot of the noose would remain, on which side of the convict the end of the rope would fall, how the hood would not be displaced because of the movement of the rope and so on. No discretion was allowed since the procedure had been scientifically worked out. All the arrangements would be carried out under the strict supervision of the jail superintendent. Exactly at the appointed time, he would wave his handkerchief. The hangman would pull the lever. The iron plates would give way and Lakshman Naik would fall. The noose would tighten around his neck, snapping the spinal chord. In a split second everything would be over.

There was a rule in the Bihar-Orissa Jail Manual to employ a prisoner to hang the convicts. This rule was in vogue in northern

Orissa. Some of the lifers acquired expertise in this work. One who did this work got a remuneration of three to five rupees or a remission in his prison sentence of fifteen days or so. For a convict undergoing a long prison sentence, the latter incentive was more attractive. The Madras State Rules provided that the jailor himself would do this work. As Berhampur was a part of Madras Presidency, the same rule was applicable there. The jailor, Rao, was from the south. He belonged to the Madras cadre and had acquired expertise in executing prisoners. There was something satanic about his appearance and gait. His language was crude. We had heard that he got a kind of devilish pleasure from hanging people, that scores of people had attained 'deliverance' in his hands. It is said that on one occasion the noose did not tighten properly around a convict's neck and he did not die. Rao Saheb climbed on to his shoulders, clutching the ends of the rope with two hands. The spray of blood coming out of the mouth, ears, and nose of the convict spattered Rao's body. However, death this time was certain. If a tribal kills somebody with a blow in a fit of anger, he is treated as an offender and sinner, unfit to live in human society. Here was a devil who was considered a respectable pillar of society, one who walked his head held high. People would vie with one another to give their daughters in marriage in families of people like these.

Today, after sending Lakshman Naik to the other world, Rao Sahib would get twenty-five rupees and a bottle of liquor as a reward. He would also get a day's leave to make good use of the bottle.

At about three o' clock in the morning all of us got up and offered our prayers. Baidyanath sang a bhajan :

"Clever girl, get yourself decked up;
you have to go to your in-law's place
where the bed as well as your dress would be made of earth.
But in the end one merges into the earth. ."

Baidyanath did not have a sweet voice, but that day he wanted to pour out all the anguish of his soul through the bhajan. Some of the prisoners had been lodged in the ward close to the cell of Lakshman Naik. After some time, a faint voice was heard from that side. Baidyanath raised the slogan, 'Inquilab zindabad'. It found its echo throughout the jail. The prisoners in all the wards had spent a sleepless

night. They seethed with suppressed anger. "Inquilab...Zindabad, Inquilab ...Zindabad, Inquilab ... Zindabad."

The entire jail poured all its tears, anger and anguish into this slogan. How long we went on shouting the slogan, I do not remember. The place where the hanging was to be carried out was a mere fifty feet away from the gate of the ward, outside the perimeter wall. The muted sound of a thud was heard after some time. My father said in a voice choked with emotion, "Why shout slogans? He, for whom you are raising slogans will not hear them now". Everyone in the jail went without food that day.

But two days later, it was again business as usual: the banalities of daily routine, the same old squabbles over rotten potatoes and dry ladies fingers.

"Lakshman Naik Phasi" in *Kasturi Mruga Sama* Cuttack: Kahani, 1995

# Memories of a Salt Satyagrahi

**Birabara Das**
Translated by Mary Mohanty

THE non co-operation movement began in our village in 1921. Madhav Chandra Sathua, who belonged to the locality, joined the movement, set up a spinning centre, and took up spinning with the help of a few women. From time to time Congress workers like Pandit Lakshmi Narayan Mishra, Bhagirathi Pattnaik came to the village and held meetings. At the time. Madhab Sathua was the only Congress worker in the village. It would not be wrong to say that he alone kept the fire of non co-operation movement going there. Those days, the public dared not raise their voices against the British government. Nevertheless, Congress workers continued their efforts to mobilize them. So, meetings of the Congress were held at the village whenever leaders came from outside.

One day, Ananta Mishra, who did propaganda work for the Congtress, Pandit Lakshmi Narayan Mishra and Bhagirathi Pattnaik arrived at our village in the morning. On seeing them, Madhab Sathua welcomed them and made arrangements for their accommodation at Samalai temple. He brought them rations. Pandit Lakshmi Narayan cooked a meal on the wide southern veranda of the temple.

I had already been a loyal follower of Madhav Sathua for over two years. Madhab babu was not good at reading and writing. He was not able to read even a newspaper. He used to receive the weekly *Samaj* by post. As soon as he would receive it, he would come to me, and I would read the newspaper out to him from end to end. This is how I came to become a part of his group.

On that day, Pandit Mishra cooked only rice and saag. He had no patience to prepare dal and curry. So, that day, the three took only rice and saag. The meeting was to be held in the afternoon. The police sub-inspector of Veden had received information about the

arrival of Pandit Mishra. So he and the habildar were camping at the local police station since midday.

The meeting took place in the large open space near Samalai temple on time. A lot of people gathered there. Pandit Laskhmi Narayan delivered an impassioned lecture. People, too, listened to him with rapt attention. At this time, the police arrived at the spot in force. When people saw them, they slipped away one by one. Only seven to eight persons remained till the end of the meeting. That day the police left without arresting anyone. I joined the Congress party the next day. I assisted Madhab baboo with carrying out activities such as spinning, growing cotton, eradication of untouchability, etc. In time, coarse clothes were made from the thread prepared at the spinning centre run by Madhab baboo. These were sold at Bargarh. Around this time, a young man named Kruthartha Acharya had set up a centre for the sale of khadi at Saharapara at Bargarh. He also used to visit our centre. Later on, Lakshman Jesowar and Sitaram Jesowar joined Congress party and took part in the movement it led. Madhab Sathua's centre was managed with financial assistance provided by Neelakantha Satapathy, a wealthy man who belonged to the same area.

At the time Pandit Lakshmi Narayan, Bhagirathi Pattnaik, Jangali Maharana who hailed from Barapali, Narsingh Guru, Chintamani Pujari, who came from Panchapara, and Ramaraksha Shukla, who belonged to Jharsuguda, were the main Congress workers in Sambalpur district. These leaders went from village to village in the district and spread the message of the Congress.

Zamindars, gauntias and men of means not only vehemently opposed the movement they also scrupulously avoided Congress workers. The apprehension that if they had anything to do with Congress either the police would harass them or their life and property would be in danger was uppermost in their minds.

One day, following Mahatma Gandhi's directives, Ghanashyam Panigrahi, a Congress worker from Manapur, gave me a few handbills and asked me to stick these on the walls of different *paras* of Ramanda village. The handbills urged people to join the salt satyagraha. Chintamani Pujari had signed the above-mentioned handbills. I took these and stuck them on walls of different *paras* of the village with great enthusiasm.

On reading the handbills, Sudarshana Bahidar, the Moktar of our village, who was appointed by the zamindar of Bijepur to oversee the administration of the village, said to the village chowkidar, Anta Ganda, to remove all these, take them to Veden police station and file a report. The report contained charges against me. The chowkidar did what he was told to do.

That day, a meeting was to be held at 4 o' clock in the afternoon. So the police sub-inspector of Veden, Bansidhar Mishra, Biswanath Pattnaik, the habildar and a few constables camped at the old police station of Remanda village. Ghanashyam Panigrahi had already come to the village. Pandit Laskhmi Narayan Mishra and Bhagirathi Pattnaik arrived later. It was a Sunday, the day of the weekly *haat*. The *haat* of Remanda village used to be held on the large open space in front of the Samalai temple. A bamboo pole carrying the Congress flag was tied to a vakul tree, which stood on the southern side of the temple. Bhagirathi Pattnaik performed this task. Pandit Ghanashyam Panigrahi presided over the meeting. Pandit Lakshmi Narayan was the speaker. Before the meeting commenced, Bhagirathi baboo sang a song:

Liquor is a dangerous addiction
It makes one lose money
Liquor is very….
He who drinks liquor loses his senses
Liquor ruins one's family business.
Liquor is very…

He sang two to three more stanzas. I cannot recall them now. He finished singing the song. After this, Ghanashyam baboo explained the objectives of the meeting, and while doing so, vigorously attacked British rule in India. At this time the police S.I. Bansidhar Mishra, habildar Biswanath Patnaik and two constables arrived. On seeing them, Pandit Lakshmi Narayan launched a tirade against the police officer who was present there before beginning his lecture. This provoked Bansidhar Mishra to declare the meeting illegal. He ordered the two constables to pull down the Congress flag, which was tied to the vakul tree. As soon as the two sepoys received the order, they

came running and were about to pull down the flag, when I caught hold of the bamboo pole to which it was tied and said that I would not let him pull it down. They forcibly untied the rope and pulled down the bamboo pole. But, I would not let go of the flag. They tried to take it out of my hands by force. Two minutes passed by in this way. On seeing this, Bansidhar Mishra, the sub-inspector himself jumped into the fray, gave me a slap and took the flag away. When Lakshmi Narayan Mishra saw this, he said in Hindi, "Let the dog have it. The bastard is beating a child". Then the five of us got arrested and were brought to the police station of the village. The five of us — Bhagirathi Pattnaik, Pandit Lakshmi Narayan Mishra, Ghanashyam Panigrahi, Madhab Sathua and I – were thrown into the police lock-up. Bansidhar Mishra and the two habildars left for Veden riding bicycles. The two sepoys guarded us all night. They gave us some puffed rice and onions to eat. But they killed a fowl, cooked rice, dal and chicken curry and had their dinner in our presence.

The night passed somehow. The two police officials came from Veden in the morning. I was fifteen at the time. On finding me so young, Bansidhar baboo asked the chowkidar of the village, Anta Gauda, to fetch him a switch. Immediately, Anta Ganda broke off a branch from a custard apple tree and handed it to Bansidhar Mishra.

Holding the switch in his right hand and waving it, he came up to me and started talking to me. He said, "You are only a child, you have a future to think of. Why have you joined these scoundrels? I shall release you if you say, 'I made a mistake, please let me go.' " I said, "Why should I ask for forgiveness? I haven't committed any crime."

On hearing this, he proceeded to beat me with the switch. Now Lakshmi Narayan baboo came and stood between me and the police sub-inspector. He said, "If you must beat someone, beat us. Remember, I shall be standing here till you beat me to death..."

Who knows what passed throught the policeman's mind but he fell silent, and went and sat down on the bedstead which lay nearby. After some time he said, "You are freed" and left for Veden the same day.

He came to our village on another day. At that time I was spinning thread with the help of a spinning wheel in our outer room. He saw this and seized the spinning wheel.

I used to spin a certain quantity of threads every day. Now that my spinning wheel was taken away, I could not do so. After two days, Madhab Sathua gave me one of his many spinning wheels. Then I resumed spinning with the help of the new wheel. But I felt hurt, as my old spinning wheel had been taken away.

Some days after this incident Ghanashyam baboo came to our village again. This time, he came to collect satyagrahis for salt satyagraha.

He had brought a few pledge forms from the district Congress office at Sambalpur. It had been decided to go to a coastal village called Inchudi in Balasore district. Those who would go there to make salt, had to sign these pledge forms and become salt satyagrahis. Inspired by Panigrahi baboo, I signed that form that very day. I was so excited that, instead of signing it in ink, I signed it in the blood I took from my thigh. True, I was fifteen at that time, but Panigrahi baboo asked me to mention in the form that I was fourteen. I did so. I found out the reason why I was asked to do so after I reached Inchudi. At that time a satyagrahi group called banara sena or monkey brigade had been formed for making salt. They were aged between eight and fourteen. Those who were included in the banara sena were caned instead of being jailed. Panigrahi baboo took my signature and left. After a week, that is, in April 1930 instruction came for us to leave for Inchudi. I went to Sambalpur in time and joined the group of satyagrahis. I had to join a small procession, wearing shorts, a half-sleeve shirt, a Gandhi cap, carrying a bamboo staff and a sling bag on my shoulder. We marched, singing songs in Hindi and Urdu. I cannot recollect the whole poem. A part of its first line is " Gird your loins, and come forward to fight a battle for peace." We shouted slogans such as "Bande Mataram, Inquilab Jindabad, Glory to mother India", etc. Words can never describe the joy that filled our hearts and how thrilled we felt as we marched on, singing the songs and shouting the slogans mentioned earlier.

Our minds had wandered off to an imaginary land. We reached Sambalpur Gate railway station. Ghanashyam Panigrahi bought us tickets. We boarded the train and began our journey to Balasore as salt satyagrahis.

Inchudi is a village by the sea. A few camps had been set up on the seashore. Sepoys on horseback were marching. On one side, stood camps of the police force and the district collector. On the other, there were innocent young satyagrahis like us. On the one side there were armed rulers, on the other stood people armed with nothing but determination, commitment to non-violence and peace. Morning came. The police began a drill on their side. Sepoys were drilled by their subedar. Many English words like 'attention'; 'right, left' and 'stop' were heard. In our camp, Pandit Ghanashyam Tripathy read out from the Gita. He recited holy Sanskrit slokas. On the one hand, there was an excited celebration of slavery. On the other, there was peaceful and devoted worship of the mother country. There was only this difference between the two groups: one group was ready to unleash tyranny while the other was prepared to bear it passively, non-violently and protest against injustice and the oppression to achieve their goal.

The Sun god appeared in the eastern sky. We, satyagrahis woke up early in the morning, finished our morning ablutions, ate soaked rice flakes mixed with molasses and picked up a small bucket each to fetch sea water.

Our leader issued the orders. We set out to fetch water. First we fetched a bucket of sea water each and poured it into the big drum kept near our camp. When we brought water for the second time, the mounted sepoys and ordinary sepoys surrounded us, snatched the buckets from our hands and poured the water on the ground. They took us to another tent. There we found the district magistrate, Jnanendra Chandra Bhahma, seated in style.

We, the monkey soldiers, were produced before him. We were given three or four blows with a cane and were set free. For three to four days we fetched water from the sea and were caned in this manner. Then our group returned to Sambalpur.

*Jibana Kallol*. Bargarh: author, 1989.

# The Plight of a Schoolboy

**Gopal Chhotray**
Translated by Chinmoy Kumar Hota

I think back to a few events which took place in 1930. I was then a student of class eight in Victoria School, Cuttack. From Kathajodi Hostel one had to walk up to Nimchowri Chowk, and then pass through Priyababu Lane and Alamchand Bazar to reach Victoria School at the Kazi Bazar. That day I started a bit late.

Dr Rajanikant Ghosh had set up a clinic in Priyanath Bhavan of Priyababu Lane. Rajani Babu belonged to the renowned Ghosh family of Cuttack's Sahebzada Bazar (Bhasakosha Lane at present). Sri Radhakant Ghosh from that family was a judge in the High Court and his son Srikant Ghosh was an I.P.S. Officer. An interesting story concerning the latter went round those days.

At that time Orissa and Bihar formed one province. Srikant Babu was staying in Patna after passing his B.A. According to convention, in the selection for the police service; preference was given to one who had performed some act of outstanding bravery if he was otherwise eligible. One day, it appeared in the newspaper that Sri Srikant Ghosh had saved the life of a person who was drowning in river Ganga. He was a candidate for Indian Police Service and this incident helped him. He joined the Indian Police Service. A few days later, it was said that the Ganga incident was not true. To get himself selected for the job, Srikant Babu had got the story circulated. It is a fact that Srikant Babu had secured the job, but let me make it clear that the drowning incident was completely hearsay.

Rajani Babu was a member of that renowned family. After obtaining his medical degree he did not look for any job but chose to set up a clinic at Priyanath Bhavan. He was a patriot, hence put on khadar dresses and observed Congress rules. That day, I found a small crowd inside the premises of the clinic. Suddenly, the police carried away our dear young leader Rajkrushna Bose first in a stretcher

and then in a van. I could not make anything of the incident. Later, I learnt that surgery was being carried out on Sri Bose's body in Rajani Babu's clinic, and after the surgery police had arrested him on his bed. By that time Sri Bose had already established himself as a dear and respectable leader of the student community. On hearing about his arrest from the operation table, I ran towards our school, which lay a short distance away. I found that classes had not started yet. I narrated the incident to the class, gasping for breath. The students were stunned. Baidhara was the leader of our class. He immediately started shouting slogans in praise of Mahatma Gandhi and Rajkrushna Bose. The whole class joined him in raising slogans. I stood with books in hand, away from my seat. Just at this time, our Headmaster, Sri Nagen Chatterjee entered the class. He was livid with rage. His eyes first fell on me. He took me to be the leader of the agitating students. He slapped my face so hard that even at this age the memory of the incident makes me smart. The slap left me unconscious for a while. The headmaster ordered all students of Class Eight, Section A to remain standing on their benches. The class teacher came and took the roll call. Normally, after this, he should have started teaching. But none of us cooperated with him. Our class teacher Agani Babu was a man of patriotic spirits. He used wear khadar dresses. He said, "You all keep standing on the bench in silence, I will go to sleep." Say this, he fell asleep. Baidhar now circulated a paper among the students, on which he had written, "Let us leave the class after this period." When the bell announcing the end of the period, we picked up our books and copies and started leaving the school premises. The Headmaster, teachers and other students stood as mute spectators. It was said that such an incident was unprecedented in the history of the school. From Class Eight, Section A, there were two of us staying in Kathajori Hostel, Krushna Chandra Das from Kanika and I. While vacating the class that day, Baidhar had instructed us to repeat the same mode of protest the next day too.

Krushna and I returned to the hostel, which was almost empty by then. Baidhar had suggested that the same thing would be repeated the next day. Both of us felt uneasy. After all, how long could this indiscipline be tolerated in a government hostel? But we did not have to ponder for long. Soon a letter was received saying that the names

of two boys, Gopal and Krushna, of Class Eight, Section A have been struck off the school register due to misconduct. The hostel, as I said, was run by the Government and hence would keep only bona fide students. At around 5 P.M. the hostel superintendent gave us written orders to vacate the hostel. This news was like thunder hitting our heads. One of my local guardians, Jalaluddin, was a resident of Nimchowri area. I used to receive my monthly expenses from him. If I went to him to ask for money now, he would lose his temper and start to rant and rave. Krushna also did not have much money. He would go to Kanika and I to Jagatsinghpur. We did not have enough money even to hire a horse-carriage to transport our luggage to the railway station. Having been brought up in a well-to-do family, I was not used to carrying heavy things; I was not required to do so. But Krushna was used to doing so. We had to go to the station anyhow. Krushna lifted one trunk on to his head without complaining. His bedroll has been placed on top of that trunk. I held one end of my trunk, and Krushna held the other. My bedroll was placed on top of my trunk. We walked like two servant boys along the road. But where to go? Krushna was all right, but my hand started hurting, and tears filled my eyes. As we walked down the Kathajodi road, we caught sight of the huge two-storied mansion near the Sunshine field belonging to Advocate Gokulananda Chowdhury, the late zamindar of Kheras in Jagatsinghpur. The signboard on the gate announced that it was the 'Congress Office.' A Congress office had been opened there for a short period to divert the attention of the government. Gokulananda Choudhuri was the scion of a famous zamindar family, but at the same time he had established himself as a renowned advocate of Cuttack city. His eldest son Gopabandhu Choudhuri had joined Congress after resigning Government job. The younger son, Nabakrushna, had also become a member of the Congress. At that time, the women of zamindar families lived within the four walls of their homes. They were not supposed even to see the sun. The two-storied building had their staircases outside the house, so whenever a woman came to the ground floor from the upper floor two maid servants held a curtain around the lady to keep her out of the sight of the public. We stood near the building. Someone, who had the aura of a leader, came out of the building and asked us, "What do you want?"

We said, "We want to join the Banar Sena (monkey brigade)." He smiled and said, "You are still too young to join the Banar Sena. Besides, you will have to obtain written permission from your guardians. Can you do that?" When we felt uneasy, he said, "Congress has not even advised the students to boycott schools, why did you leave school? We cannot do anything for you. You go back home." We were dumbstruck. After that, when he learnt that we did not have any money, he asked us to wait and went inside. We stayed there for the night, and were given *roti* and *dalma* to eat, the next day the office gave us money to enable us to return home. Everyone at home was surprised to see me coming with my baggage. As my father was no more, the event shocked my seventy-year-old grand father. It was he(my father's uncle), who had got me enrolled at the high school at Cuttack. He stared at me withtear-filled eyes, without uttering a word as I narrated the whole story. When I described the merciless beating by the Headmaster, my grandmother intervened, saying, "Enough is enough, he does not require any more schooling. My grandson won't go back to Cuttack again to receive any more thrashing. His father has left enough property to last three generations." Her words silenced everyone. That night as I tried to sleep, but a question kept bothering me: "Have my studies come to an end? In the last few months, I had imagined so many things about my future. Will all these be burnt to ashes?"

After a few days, the postman delivered a letter. The headmaster had written, "Get your ward readmitted to the school within seven days of receipt of this letter. This offer is valid for only seven days." Leave alone seven days, within seven minutes my grandfather started for Cuttack, taking me with him. We reached the school by mid-day and I was readmitted. My grandfather signed an undertaking to the effect that his grandson would never repeat the mistake he had committed earlier. My local guardian, Jalal chacha, cautioned me about many things. Then grandfather returned to our village.

*Pathika* Cuttack : Vidyapuri, 1995.

# Women and the Salt Satyagraha in Orissa

**Godabari Devi**
Translated by Arun Kumar Mohanty

AS the message of Swadeshi spread in the villages, we girls discarded foreign garments and jewelry and took to wearing khadi. Every day newspapers carried Mahatma Gandhi's call to countrymen to throw away foreign goods and put on khadi. The Swadeshi movement had spread in cities like Calcutta. Came 1930. The Salt Satyagraha was launched. After Gandhiji got arrested, Sarojini Naidu led the Dandi March. Our most revered Acharya Harihar Das, the first general of the Salt Satyagraha in Orissa, led the march from Cuttack. Pandit Pranakrushna Padhiary and several other soldiers of the non-cooperation movement had joined the march. People greeted them in every village they passed through. Villages resounded with the blowing of conch shells and ululation. Girls and women cast aside their shyness and came out spontaneously to honour the Acharya, a sage-like person. Old and conservative people used all the means at their disposal to dissuade them, but they were simply powerless to check the mighty current of this movement. The sacred stream of non-cooperation flowed through Orissa.

We girls greeted the satyagrahis when the procession passed through our village. Conservative village elders disapproved of our action and frowned on us. I was thirteen at the time. I was forbidden to step out beyond the threshold. I was pronounced guilty of committing a crime. People commented that I had grown unruly, as my mother was dead and was not there to control and restrict me. However, my grandmother was more liberal than other old women. She had spent the major part of her life in Cuttack. My grandfather occupied an important position in the Government. I still remember the remnants of opulence like foreign liquor in our house in my childhood.

After the first team led by Acharya Harihar left for Inchudi, the second team was to leave Cuttack under the leadership of

Gopabandhu Choudhuri, whom everyone affectionately called 'father.' As they started the march, they were arrested on the outskirts of Cuttack. The news that created a sensation was the management of affairs at Inchudi by the great women leaders from Orissa, who included Jahnabi Devi, Sarala Devi, Rama Devi, Subhadra Mahtab and Kokila Devi. Many village girls from Balasore had accompanied Subhadra Mahtab. Those who camped there included Maina Bibi, Malati Devi and Kshetramani Devi. Rama Devi (we called her 'mother'), Malati Choudhuri, Sarala Devi and others stayed at Cuttack and held meetings in villages to persuade people to join the movement, to collect food for the Satyagrahis and to pass on messages. They also raised funds for the movement. Women gave away their ornaments. Students from high schools left their studies to join the movement. Several poems charged with nationalistic fervour—"Bandira Atmakatha" by Gopabandhu Das, " Palasy Abasane" by Mahtab, "Ahwan" by Kuntala Kumari Sabat, " Jatiya Sangita" by Kantakabi Lakshmikanta, " Mohana Bansi" by Jatiyakabi Bira Kishore—and the patriotic poems of Banchhanidhi could bring even the rocks alive.

Everyone, from the cowherd boys in villages to educated boys of both villages and towns, held a spinning *takli* in hand and sang the national anthem. The Banara Sena came to the forefront of the movement. Simple, bold and defiant boys from rural areas had joined the Sena. They were beaten, jailed and tortured, but nothing could deter them. They made faces at the police. Swaraj Ashram at Cuttack bustled with activities. Rama Devi, Kala Mausi and Kokila Devi had come to our village to hold a meeting. They collected donations and a meeting was held in the afternoon. My friends accompanied them from door to door. However, they could not muster the courage to attend a public meeting. I was defiant by nature. With the visitors I came to the other end of the village, where the meeting was organized. I wonder if people understood the purpose of the meeting; but the fact that the daughter from a renowned family, who was also the daughter-in-law of an equally renowned family, was addressing them had astounded the villagers. The incident inspired me and I gathered courage to say something at the meeting of women being held at the place of our ancestor, late Babaji Mukunda Das that evening. Later, I felt that

I should not have made a speech on that occasion. The village women donated a little money and a few ornaments. In our village, the movement might not have received much support in terms of money. However, the very fact that a woman could address a gathering and invoke their spirit of freedom had led many to believe that a woman's life, which is often considered of no consequence, held some significance after all.

I became an object of ridicule and censure after that incident. Although I had appeared at the scholarship examination when I was a student of the lower primary school, I would not get the scholarship because I discontinued my studies. Had my mother been alive, I would have tried to persuade her to send me to Cuttack for higher studies. Although a girls' upper primary school was set up in our village that year, I was not fortunate enough to study there. I was running thirteen then and was not expected to cross the threshold of the house. What is the point of a grown-up girl studying? I felt rebellious but was helpless. I told Rama Devi to arrange for my studies elsewhere and engage me in serving the nation. But those days it was not possible to do these two things at the same time. High school students gave up their studies to join the movement. They participated in it, were beaten up by police and courted arrest.

I kept in touch with Rama Devi. We girls continued to devote ourselves to spinning and reading newspapers. I read the Bengali translation of Gandhiji's interpretation of the 'Anasakti Yoga' of *Gita* and the book *Swaraj* in Hindi. The simple truths of the *Gita* and Gandhi's views on them and also Gandhiji's vision of an exploitation-free India left a deep imprint on me. We read out *puranas* to old women. My aunt, Nayan Dei often did it. In the afternoons, women pressed her to read out *Dardhyatya Bhakti*, *Markanda Purana*, the *Ramayan*, the *Mahabharata* and other texts to them. I sat beside her when she recited these to them. When she did not do the reading, I did it on my own. After that, we read newspapers, spun, did sewing, etc. Newspapers carried stories on boycot of foreign clothes and the use of homegrown articles. These matters also found a place in our discussions.

*Punyabati Godabari*, Bhubaneswar: Sudipta Prakashan, 1997.

# The Kaipara Firing

**Annapurna Maharana**
Translated by Arun Kumar Mohanty

ON our return from Ramachandrapur, we discussed our programme of agitation with the teachers. We worked hard to implement the programme in and around Bari village. Meetings were organized in the villages that lay on either side of river Brahmani. The tasks of securing the resignation of chowkidars, dafadars and presidents, burning the uniforms of chowkidars, setting up village panchayats and forming suicide squads were pursued vigorously.

Godabari Devi from Kalyanpur, Sakuntala from Atira, and Kiranalekha from Rajong came to know that Mangala Devi and Gunanidhi babu were arrested from Seva Ghar at Bari. They came to Bari and took possession of Seva Ghar. With Bhagirath babu, Priyambada Devi, Haripriya Devi and Usha Devi they formed a team and organized meetings in several villages lying between Bari and Baliapal. Gobardhan Puhan, Birabar Rath, Akrura Jena and others organized people at Arangabad, Dharpur and other places. Baidyanath held meetings in the villages situated on the other side of river Kharasuan, Banchhanidhi at Bainsiria, Rangadhar babu at Amatapur, Basudev Samal at Balibila, Padmanabha Ray at Chhatrapada, Madhu babu at Aliabad, Jagabandhu Jena at Ratnagiri and Ratnakar, Jadu and others at Bagda. The fire of freedom raged in the entire Bari area. Madhu Nanda of Puri and Jagannath Das of Bagalpur were at the time undergoing teachers' training at Ramachandrapur. As it was planned to set fire to the Binjharpur Police Station, Jagannath Das came back to Bagalpur and led the movement there. Madhu Nanda went to Kaipara and his mission was to raise the awareness of people there. The idea of taking over the police station and the post office crossed his mind. One day, while trying to convince the postmaster of Kaipra post office to tender his resignation, he gathered the papers there and set those on fire. By that time, setting fire to the post office

had not formed a part of the agitational programme. Madhu Nanda did it, acting on no one's advice. He informed us of this at Ramachandpur and left for Kusupur to spread the message of the agitation.

Government circles at Cuttack were shocked that the Government machinery was no longer working at Bari. Government employees did not like to go to Bari because the road was very muddy. However, the incident of setting post office papers on fire brought the police force to Kaipara. By coincidence, on that very day, a meeting was planned at Kairpara *gola*. Rishi Behera, a teacher of the non-government elementary school, was in charge of the agitation at Kaipara and the villages nearby. He was to address the gathering that day. Sarat babu was to attend the meeting. As he was bedridden, suffering from fever, it was decided that I would go to Kaipara.

I left for Kaipara at about 1 P.M. When I reached the grove at Sanyasipur, I noticed Krushna, Ram and other members of the suicide squad coming excitedly from the direction of Kaipara. They saw me and all started speaking at the same time. With difficulty, I could make out that they had come to Kaipara *gola* to see the armed police who, they were told, had arrived there. As a meeting had been planned, people had started collecting there. As the crowd swelled, the police officer asked, " Why have you gathered here?" Hrushi bhai replied, "A meeting will be held here." Then the officer asked, "Who will address the meeting?" Came the reply, "Rama Devi." The police officer laughed. Rama Devi was in prison. The officer ordered the force to disperse the crowd and the policemen advanced towards the people. The crowd dispersed. But the members of the suicide squad would not go back. They stuck to their places. On the orders of the officer, the police arrested Hrushi bhai and a few others. Krushna and others held the view that as the meeting was scheduled at Kaipara, it would be held no matter what. Krushna was excited. The police had arrested their brother. He urged the people to go and secure his release. As they started towards Kaipara under the leadership of Rishi babu, a man came running and informed them that the police force alongwith Hrushi bhai and others were proceeding towards the riverbank to board a boat. Only a few policemen were left at Kaipara. On hearing this, they proceeded to the boat to plead with the police to give up their

jobs and set Hrushi bhai and others free. Gadadhar Palit of Anyasipur was in the grove at the time. The people ran to catch up with the police before they boarded the boat. I could not keep pace with them and took to a different path – a path running through the marshland. It was not a proper path and I came upon a screwpine hedge. A man was working there. As I asked him the way, the sound of a gunshot was heard. The man accompanied me and as we hurried towards the spot, we saw two men carrying Ram of Hatsahi. He was bleeding. I tore my sari-end and used it as a bandage to cover his wound. I saw people carrying Saunti Malik and Hadibandhu Panda. Suprabhat, a nine-year old boy, was accompanying them. The wound on his arm was bleeding. As I was tying a piece of cloth to bandage the wound, Krushna came running and said that Mayadhar Bhuyan was wounded and was lying in the marsh. By then, people had carried Sanand Swain, who had also been wounded.

As I was about to proceed to the place where Mayadhar lay, the people present there urged me not to go there: "The force is now blood-thirsty. Please do not go there." But how can I go away leaving Mayadhar lying there? I started running towards the spot; Krushna and Suprabhat followed me. We reached the spot and saw Mayadhar lying there, face down. The bayonet had pieced a bone in his neck. His body lay in a pool of blood. As we tried to raise him, we saw policemen marching towards Kaipara again. I thought that Mayadhar was alive. I urged the leader of the police team in the name on humanity to ferry us across the river in the police boat so that we could take him to Binjharpur hospital. Of course, I said hard words. They did not reply, proceeded to the *gola* and returned to the bank with the policemen they had left there. It was clear that they were worried over the firing. Krushna and I carried Mayadhar's body to the road. When people came to know that the police had left the place, they came there one after another and brought his body to Hatasahi.

There I heard that Saunti's dead body was thrown in the Brahmani. The villagers took Mayadhar's body in a procession, moved round the village and buried it in the Ajana field. Arrangements were made to send Nidhi Samal, Ram and others to Kendrapara for treatment. All this happened on Gahma Purnima, the full moon day in the month of Bhadrav, the 26th of August 1942.

Before the Kaipara firing, Godabari Devi and others had courted arrest on the 20th of August 1942 at Baliapal. Bira babu Gobardhan babu, Gobind Samal, Dhruba Ray and others were working there. Those days there was a dispute between the Puhan family and the family of Gokhai Jena. Certain miscreants set Gokhai Jena's house on fire. An FIR was lodged with the police. Policemen came, linked the arson to the movement; Gobardhan babu and his brothers were arrested. We were afraid that this family dispute might lead to a decline in the people's interest in the movement. So we devoted more time to the agitation and carried out our activities at Bari, Arangabad and the neighboring villages. We were close to the Muslims of the area and they were well disposed towards the movement. At Bari durgah, they all resolved to carry the movement forward together.

Before sunrise on the 30th August, we received a message that an Additional District Magistrate, an Additional Superintendent of Police and a platoon had come from Cuttack and were camping at the Minor School on the mound since the previous night. A number of Muslims from Binjharpur accompanied them. They would employ these people as hired musclemen to collect a collective fine of six thousand rupees, which had been imposed on the people. The Havildar did not allow anyone to come to the mound.

Sarat babu and I went to Bari to find out what had really happened. The Magistrate was holding court in the school. When he saw us, he told us that he and Gopa babu had joined as Deputy Magistrates on the same day. He drew our attention to the cartridge boxes and said that he had been sent here to use, if necessary, all these six thousand cartridges to collect six thousand rupees from the people of this area. In Bari, we went around the villages. It was not difficult to motivate the people not to pay the fine. But people were scared: if they refused to pay it the officials would use low-caste men and Muslims as musclemen to harass them; they would lose their caste and women would lose their honour.

The Additional S.P., Jyotish Chandra Ghosh himself was supervising the collection. Muslims from Binjharpur outnumbered the policemen, who accompanied him. At Bari, I realised how the caste system had weakened us and how the British government followed the policy of divide and rule to run this country.

The Magistrate and his entourage stayed in the Minor School till the collection of fine was over. After their job was finished, they demolished the roofs of Seva Ghar, the Cottage Tannery and Khadi Workers' Training Centre, threw away the books of the library. They engaged a guard at Seba Ghar, arrested us on 2nd September and took us to Binjharpur. After the arrest of teachers and experienced workers, the students of the elementary school carried on the movement under the leadership of Sobharani Panda. A police outpost was set up at the Cottage Tannery and the police arrested the agitators from every house in every village of the locality.

On Gandhij's direction, we had come to the village and devoted ourselves to tasks such as tending cattle and keeping bees. A number of freedom fighters expressed the view that this would not help the movement. But Gandhij was firm on his stand that public relations established through these activities would certainly raise the awareness of the masses. The power of inspiring patriotic feelings lay hidden in constructive work— this was demonstrated at Bari in 1942.

We were brought to Cuttack jail under the supervision of Sergeant John and Additional SP, JC Ghosh. After a gap of ten years, I was again lodged in Ward No.12. By that time, Rama Devi, Malati Devi, Priyambada Devi and others had settled there. They surrounded me excitedly to get the latest information. After the excitement subsided, I found out a place for myself, spread my bedroll and enrolled myself in Malati Devi's music class.

*Amruta Anubhav*. Bhubaneswar: Sikshasandhan, 2005

# Flying the Tricolour

**Baikuntha Nath Mohanty**

Translated by Jatindra Kumar Nayak

FOUR months later, all those who were less than eighteen years of age, were released from the jail. I was among them. I came back to Cuttack and shortly afterwards got arrested again. I was taken to Patna jail. This time I had been sentenced to serve nine months. After about five months, I don't know why, I was released.

Now began a life of unbearable misery. The police would not arrest us, but they would not let us even have a meal in peace. They tried to find out whose houses we visited, where we were given food or a place to stay. They threatened anyone who gave us food or shelter. We found shelter in the riverbed of Katjuri and the verandah of the town hall. However, undeterred by these threats, Radha Charan Mohapatra who lived in Telenga Bazar, Bana, the wrestler and Kartik Sahoo made us stay in their houses and fed us. Gouranga Bhai's patriotism was memorable.

I remained a close friend of his as long as he was alive. He used to support a very large family from what he earned by running a small groceries shop. His children have now established themselves in life. He died a happy man.

Every day, eight to ten of us 'monkey soldiers' went out to do picketing or take out a procession. The police gave us a good thrashing and herded us into the police station. They would not give us anything to eat the whole day and load us like sacks onto buses, take us to Chandaka or Khuntuni jungle and leave us there in the evening. We would spend the night in the jungle infested with the wild beasts. In the morning, we would make our way back to Cuttack, begging for alms in the villages we passed through. The villagers would fill our bowls with alms with great love and enthusiasm. They would insist on our eating to our heart's content, and make us forget the pain of being beaten, the pangs of hunger. When we reached Cuttack once

again we took out processions, did picketing, and sold prohibited books.

I distinctly remember how severely a Bihari jamadar called Bhagatram beat me while I was leading a small procession. That beating has left indelible marks on my body and my mind. I fainted while he beat me. He would pour water into my mouth, make me come to and start beating me again. I was taken to the town Police station while I was still unconscious. It is now known as Lalbag police Station. All the policemen there tortured me to force me to put my signature on a letter of apology. But they did not succeed. My front teeth became loose from the beating. I lost them when I was still very young.

When Gandhi came back from London, disappointed in the beginning of 1932 after attending the Round Table Conference, the Gandhi—Irwin pact was nullified. We all returned to Cuttack. A huge meeting was held on the bed of river Katjuri. Marwood was the collector of Cuttack at that time. I had then a very sweet singing voice. Whoever heard me sing was completely charmed. On that day, I sang a song written by Bira Kishore Das and left listeners spell-bound for hours on end. In those days, loudhailers were not in use. Thr song goes like this:

This is a government of hooligans
Its policy is holiganism and stupidity
It follows no laws
And runs everything on whims
Its wits and its strength are all gone
Desperate, it squandered a lot of money
Holding two round-table conferences
But the table is no longer round
All its sides are now crooked.
People in England have great fun
While we die here paying taxes
They rob the cowherd boy
To help the cobbler's son marry.

Marwood was present at the meeting. He was an Irishman. The meaning of the song was explained to him. He lunged at me and ordered me to stop singing the song. But, paying no attention to him, I

went on singing even more loudly. Unable to control his rage, he gave me two or three blows with the baton he was carrying. But, undeterred, I kept singing. A few more blows rained on my back, on which bloody welts now appeared. This agitated people, who hurled abuses at Marwood and pushed him towards the meeting place. Marwood felt vulnerable and, seeing no other way out ordered a lathi-charge. Beaten by lathis people ran helter-skelter. Many got injured from the severe beating. Five to six of us, volunteers, stood silently. Blows from the lathis kept raining on our backs. I can never put the memory of that experience ever out of my mind. We received a severe beating, but we did not buckle. We stood the ground like disciplined soldiers. The thought of fleeing from the battlefield like cowards never even crossed our minds.

The national flag flew on the roof of the cutcherry every day. This was done under the leadership of Sudhir Bose. Every morning, people would notice that the Union Jack had been replaced by the tri-colour. Investigation was carried out to find out who was doing all this. The police set to work seriously to catch the culprit. But noone got caught. For about fifteen days the investigation went on.

The Swaraj Ashram in Cuttack had been taken over by the Police. It was decided that groups of satyagrahis would go and try to wrest the Ashram from the conrol of police and fly the tri-colour on the roof of the Ashram. Golak Moharana (he is now no more) from Banki took the leadership of this initiative. At the time a ferocious English man called Lane was the Police officer in charge of Cuttack. He was completely devoid of pity. He was very cross with the satyagrahis. On being informed of our plan to repossess the Ashram, Lane arrived there accompanied by a group of policemen, all of whom carried a regulation lathi fitted with a brass knob. Lane carried a whip. He beat the satyagrahis with it mercilessly, breaking someone's head, fracturing someone else's limbs. The skin on some satyagrahis' backs broke. Many fell unconscious. But the beating would not stop. After this, on his orders, the police subjected the satyagrahis to cruel torture. No one could bear to see the inhuman treatment meted out to satyagrahis. In those days, a lithographed newspaper called, *Biplabi* was being brought out under the editorship of Surendra Dwivedi. Some of us used to leave copies of this newspaper at every home in the

town at night. The newspaper carried detailed reports on the cruel, heartless deeds of Lane. The reports were moving and heart-rending. After reading these, the people of the town came in large numbers and assembled in front of the Ashram on the third day of the Satyagraha. They all denounced Lane. The sight of such a large crowd unnerved Lane a bit. But, this time too, the Satyagrahis returned covered with wounds. My turn to go to the Ashram came on the fourth day. Before the police force arrived, we gave the two constables watching the Ashram gate the slip and flew the tri-colour. Lane arrived and started beating us with the regulation lathi. The skin on our backs broke. Something sharp and pointed pierced my back and I got a terrible burning sensation. I don't remember what happened afterwards. When I regained consciousness, I found myself lying in the hospital. I opened my eyes and saw that I was still carrying my beloved tricolour in my hand. Lane had tried very hard to pull it out of my hand but had not succeeded. This was why he had whipped me. At last, he stabbed me with a bayonet.

*Smrutira Surabhi.* Cuttack: Orissa Book Store, 1985

# A Fateful Evening

**Kashinath Nayak**
Translated by Arun Kumar Mohanty

THE 14th of August 1942. It was the weekly market day at Nimapara. Lots of people gathered there on this day. Evening approached. The main road that led to the police station became crowded. It had been decided long ago to bring the police station and the post office under our control. Adikanda Sahu and one of his associates were given the task of setting the post office on fire. Gradually it grew dark. While proceeding to strike the target from the rear of the Ashram, Adikanda Sabat and his associate caught sight of me and dragged me along. Although I was aware of the entire plan, I had not involved myself in any of these activities. However, I could not say no to Adikanda babu and accompanied him to the rear of the post office by taking an unusual path. We had a stick wrapped with a piece of cloth soaked in kerosene and a matchbox. However, the guard, who was there behind the post office, shouted and that spoiled our plan. We ran away towards the Ashram. Although we knew that there was a guard at the front side of the post office, we had not expected to find another at the back as well. I rushed to the Ashram. Adikanda babu disappeared into the crowd. However, I felt restless. Immediately I came on to the road. Several onlookers and I stood on the veranda of Giridhari Jena's cloth store.

Near the police station, Baikuntha, Bhabani, Alekha, Loknath and a few others came to the forefront and shouted slogans. Darkness thickened. Twelve armed constables stood in two rows between the police station and the gate, waiting for orders. People started hurling stones at the police station. The Inspector patiently yet firmly appealed to the masses to desist from these acts, but to no avail. First he ordered blank-fire. Still the people did not pay any heed to it. By then, a few policemen had sustained injuries. The Inspector lost his patience. He ordered the constables to fire at the lower limbs. A few got hit in their

legs. People started dispersing. In no time, the place got deserted. But the police caught hold of a few agitators who were in the front and dragged them to the lock-up.

A little later, the silence of the graveyard hung over the area around the police station. After everything became quiet, a policeman informed the sub-inspector that he found a man lying on the ground. A bullet had hit him in the chest. He was immediately sent to the hospital, where he was declared dead. The man was identified to be Utsab Malik. The news spread the following morning. I heard it from Senapati, the dafadar.

The crowd had dispersed after the firing. Rabi Das of Bishnupur, several others and I stood there on the verandah of Giridhari Jena's cloth store. Suddenly a bullet hissed past the right hand of Bishnu Das. He told about it to us, but others advised him not to talk about it to others. We left the place.

I was disappointed at the turn of events. I lay on the bed and brooded over the failure of the plan. The thought of the miserable condition of my dear ones and the inhuman treatment meted out to people at the police station had robbrd my eyes of sleep. Suddenly,I heard someone calling me. "Who is there?" I asked. "Senapati," was the reply. The fear that I was being summoned to the police station suddenly appeared real. I opened the door. Senapati said,"The boys are in a pitiable condition. They are lying in the lock-up and outside, almost dead. The order was to fire from below. But Malik was sitting on a milestone. The bullet hit him in the chest. I have come here to make you a request. Hope you'll oblige me.The boys have not taken even a glass of water since morning. They had organized the masses. You have seen what happened in the evening. Seven or eight of them have been beaten up severely. They are lying senseless. The sub inspector has gone to his quarters and must have gone to sleep by now. In the morning, they will be sent to Puri. They would not be able to stand hunger for two days. If you can get some rice and dalma cooked, I can feed them. Raghu babu did not bother about them and has gone to sleep."

Immediately I called the cook and asked him to cook rice and dalma. Senapati brought two buckets from the Ashram, filled them with the food, held one and asked me to carry the other and follow

him. I felt an urge to see the boys. Without giving any thought to the consequences, I followed him. We did not take the main road. Instead, we took a different one running past Raghu Sahu's quarters, the one which people usually did not take. It was dark everywhere. The lantern glowed like a glowworm. As soon as we reached police station, the dafadar took the bucket from me and said in a low voice," Take this lane and leave this place at once." My desire to see the boys remained unfulfilled. The path he asked me to take was an unused thorny one running between the police station compound and the estate wall. I prayed to the goddess and made my way. Thorns pricked my body. My shirt got torn. Since I was wearing a pair of chappals, my feet were spared. I was grateful to the goddess, for I did not encounter a snake.

As I was walking fast, a policeman stopped me and asked me several questions. He suspected my intentions and said,"Well, you can go now. But you have to come to the police station tomorrow and explain yourself."

*Sikshakara Jibanasmruti*. Bhubaneswar: Sikshasandhan, 2005

# A Boy Prisoner

**Nilamani Routray**

Translated by Sangram Jena

KHANKIHAT was an important place in our locality. Several shops vending opium, ganja, and country liquor were there. Picketing such shops was a part of Gandhiji's and Congress party's programme of prohibition. Once I was going to Khankihat. On my way I saw a very old man almost running down the road. He looked very agitated and perturbed. I asked him "What's the matter?" He talked to me about the picketing of opium shops and enquired, 'Where is Gandhi?" When I asked him why he was looking for Gandhi, he replied, "I will kill him. He has ordered the closure of all opium shops. I could not get opium. I am affected by severe cold and my nose has started running. " Listening to that old man, I wanted to see for myself what really was going on at Khankihat. When I got there, I found that a big crowd had assembled before the opium shop. Coming closer, I saw some satyagrahis, the tricolour in hand, shouting slogans and another group of satyagrahis were lying on the ground before these shops. Some constables and chowkidars were trying to disperse them. I got extremely agitated at the sight. I joined the satyagrahis and started shouting slogans at the top of my voice. The police arrested all these volunteers lying on the ground. They were made to walk all the way to Bhadrak. Bhadrak was about nine miles away from there. Surrounded by the police, the satyagrahis walked down the road shouting slogans. I also walked by their side shouting slogans. In spite of repeated police warnings, I did not stop. At last, disgusted, the police took me to Bhadrak police station along with other satyagrahis. Initially the police did not arrest me as I was a child. But when I went on running by their side, shouting slogans, they were forced to arrest me and take me along with other demonstrators. When the police took us to Bhadrak, I saw my father returning from Bhadrak along the same road from the opposite direction. If I remember right,

Prahallad Mahapatra, a well-known Congress worker of our locality, was with us that day. My father was upset when he found me in the midst of demonstrators and the police. He requested the police to release me, but by that time my name had already been included in the list of the accused, so they could not oblige my father.

The police at first took us to the court premises at Bhadrak and later in the evening remanded us to judicial custody. My father and my elder brother started trying to secure my release from jail. However, I had to spend eight to ten days in jail. Other inmates in the jail used to love me as I was very young. All political prisoners in jail used to attend the common prayer meeting. I also regularly attended these prayers. One day I recited loudly the famous lines of Bhaktakavi "Oh! The creator of the whole universe, the protector of my life" in the prayer session. In those days, a very rude havildar was in charge of Bhadrak jail. He wore a long beard and his appearance was frightening. Suddenly he appeared before our room, and with thunder in his voice, he ordered us to stop shouting, stamping the floor with his heavy boots. Everyone was taken aback. Then he shouted, "This wretched brat is singing at such a high pitch. Stop him from singing. Such a small chap, but he is singing so loudly that the officer in his quarters can hear him. Will he deprive me of my job?" In fact, our prayer ended with his shout, but the next morning we complained about the havildar to the physician. But he paid no heed to the complaint. One day, we were tried in the Bhadrak court. At that time Sri Kartik Chandra was the S.D.O. of Bhadrak. He asked the police many questions about me. The police also explained the circumstances leading to my arrest. I was acquitted since I was a child, but others were convicted and sent to jail. However, by that time, I had already served eight to ten days of imprisonment.

*Smruti O Anubhuti.* Cuttack: Grantha Mandir, 1986

## A Glimpse of the Mahatma

**Surendra Mohanty**

Translated by Jatindra Kumar Nayak

IT was our last year at school. Teachers were taking extra classes to finish the course. For some of us staying at the school hostel, who were good students, arrangements had also been made for giving usregular coaching. Teachers and students alike were working very hard to ensure that the school did well at the Patna University examination.

I used to buy a copy of the Oriya newspaper, the *Samaj*, from the bus stand every day. As a matter of fact, reading the newspaper was part of my daily academic routine. As a result, I always secured the highest marks in general knowledge and debating. One day, I learnt from the *Samaj* that the Sarba Seba Sangha was going to hold a conference at Delang-Berboi, which would be attended by Mahatma Gandhi and other important Congress leaders. In no time the news spread everywhere: 'The Mahatma will come to Orissa, the Mahatma will come to Orissa.'

I went to our Superientendent, Manmohan babu, and said, 'I want to see Mahatma Gandhi. Please allow me leave.' He said no. One day, early in the morning, I boarded a bus at the bus stand at Salipur and came to Jagatpur, not caring for the consequences of my action. I had only two rupees in my pocket. At Jagatpur railway station I met two other students from our school. They enquired if I was on my way to Delang. I said yes. They informed me that a special train would leave Cuttack for Delang at midday. We walked across the sands of river Mahanadi, and took the ferry at the Jobra pier and arrived at Cuttack railway station. We did not buy tickets for travelling in the special train. At any rate, no ticket inspector came in to check if we had tickets - may be they stayed away out of respect for the Mahatma. When the train pulled out of the station, the air resounded with the cry 'Victory to Mahatma Gandhi.' At every station the train stopped,

we shouted from inside the carriage, 'Victory to Mahatma Gandhi.' The passengers waiting on the platform responded by raising the slogan, 'Victory to Mahatma Gandhi.'

This showed how the very name of Mahatma Gandhi inspired and excited the masses of ordinary people in India at the time.

The train reached Delang in the afternoon. There I saw that hundreds of huts made of coconut branches had been built outside the station. Their floors were made up of straw. The delegates stayed in these huts, spreading their bedsheets on the floor. We were told that Mahatma Gandhi would presently appear before the people assembled there. We forgot all about taking our food, and rushed to the place where Mahatma Gandhi was to speak to every one. There was a field a short distance away from the camp. It lay surrounded by screwpine bushes. The field had already been packed with women, young and old, who had come from the villages. There were very few men among the audience. The women, the end border of their sarees pulled over their faces, waited silently for the Mahatma, like shadows. The volunteers did not allow us to go into this crowd of women. We stood by the screwpine bushes, waiting for the Mahatma.

A dais consisting of a chair set on a four-poster had been erected for the Mahatma. When he arrived, the men shouted 'Victory to Mahatma Gandhi' and 'Haribol'. The women ulullated. The noise they made took a long time to subside. Then Mahatma Gandhi raised his right hand slightly in the attitude of blessing the people, and gave a speech. What he said no one seemed to understand. But who had come to listen to his speech, anyway? The village women, one tying the end border of her saree to that of another, who had assembled there, the daily labourer who had come there forgoing a day's wage, the peasants who had rushed there, neglecting their fields would make little sense of Gandhi's speech. They had all come only for a glimpse of the Mahatma. To have set their eyes on him for once was what mattered most to them. This was all that the Mahatma's speech meant to them.

As I stood there, I remembered another incident. I cannot recall the exact year in which it took place. I was then a student of the Metcalf middle school at Kanpur. Gandhiji had come to the village of Jiginipatapur, which was under Salipur police station. Jiginipatpur lay at a distance of six to seven miles from Raisunguda. My mother,

on hearing that Gandhiji was coming, was insistent that she must go to see him. Father closed his dispensary for that day. As far as I can remember, it was a summer morning. My mother and a few other women set out for Jiginipatpur in a hired bullock cart. Father, an umbrella in hand, walked in front of the cart. I ran along, kicking up a little cloud of dust. But I could not see Gandhi on that day. My mother and other women did. On my way back, I asked her, 'What did Gandhi say to you?' My father, like me, had not been able to see Gandhi. So mother was full of a sense of self-importance, for only she in our whole family had had the good fortune of having seen Gandhi. She replied, gravely, "What could he say? All he had to say was, 'Spin thread, and hand all your jewellery to me.' He had nothing else to say. His body glowed like a thin gold stick." She would have gone on and on in this vein, but I interrupted her, saying, "What ornaments did you give him?" She made a face and said, "Why should I give him my ornaments? I paid my respects to him, making him an offering of a silver coin."

That day, at Berboi, the same thing was happening again. The village women who had poured into that place, riding bullock carts or walking, felt no need for listening to Gandhi's speech. One glimpse of Gandhi was all that mattered to them. This kind of mesmeric effect on the masses of India, which Gandhi exercised, was—and will be—beyond any other leader. From the point of view of millions in India at that time, Gandhi was truly an incarnation. It amazes one when one thinks of the way he managed to invest a political and economic programme with a religious significance.

We left Delang the next day in the morning. When I arrived in Cuttack, I found that I was left with only a four-anna coin. With this I could not have paid for my bus fare to Salipur. So we decided to cover the distance from Jagatpur to Salipur by foot. By the time we came as far as Padmapur, we were so worn out that our feet refused to move. We slept on a cement platform under a banyan tree, which stood in the bazar of Padmapur. Our fatigue had made us forget our hunger. When we reached our hostel the next day, I found that my feet had swollen up like a loaf of bread.

Manmohan babu asked me, 'Did you get to see Mahatma Gandhi?'

I smiled and said, 'Yes, Sir.'

**'Gandhi Maharajki Jai', *Patha O Pruthivi*, Bhubaneswar: Eastern Media, 1986**

# The Communist Conspiracy Case

**Gangadhar Rath**

Translated by Akhtar Jamal Khan

ON 2nd July 1940, renowned communist leaders were arrested for their involvement in the Communist conspiracy. It was alleged that in 1934 they had opened a branch of the Communist Party in Orissa and been engaged in a conspiracy against British rule. Ramakrushna Pati and Ramakrushna Mishra were the only persons in Cuttack who could help those who had got arrested. Ramakrushna Pati had not yet become a member of Communist Party officially, but he was considered a supporter of the communists. He got drawn into the Communist Party automatically. His chief supporter was Ramachandra Mishra, a second-year student of Ravenshaw College.

I did not know Ramakrushna Pati personally before this. Of course, I had listened to him occasionally during my student career. Verbosity was the key feature of his speeches. He published a small magazine called, *Where is the Congress Heading?* In 1940, Congress socialist ideology had been propagated through this. Bhagabati Panigrahi, the chief spokesperson of the Communist Party, had therefore taken the magazine to task. But everyone felt that he was very much inclined torwards Marxist ideology and the articles appearing in this magazine had been lacking this very thing. He had been battling desperately with the case, and while doing so, his transformation had come about.

Rama babu used to stay at a Gujarati businessman's house as a tenant in the college square. The house was called 'Silver House'. His father, Ananda Chandra Pati had retired as headmaster from Puri Zilla School. He lived in a village near Phulnakhra across the river. They were quite well off. But refusing to follow the path chosen by his father for him, he engaged in political activities and had therefore been ostracized by the family. This is why, instead of residing in his own house at Dagarpara, he lived in a rented house at the college square.

We used to address Rama Chandra Mishra as "Ram Mishre". Although Mishra's name figured in the college register, he was always busy doing party work. He had no time for nor interest in his studies. While studying in class XI, I got acquainted with him and his involvement in student affairs. I was aware of his communist leanings and his association with the Party. All the students who studied in Ravenshaw College and were drawn to communism were introduced to Ramakrushna Pati by Rama Chandra Mishra. We used to meet and discuss our future course of action. Ramkrushna Pati's association with Shailen Mohapatra, Jagat Krushna Das, Bipin Bihari Das (Balikuda), Satyabadi Mishra and with me began around this time. My chief tasks included collecting funds from students, certain eminent teachers, and distributing Marxist literature among them.

I was drawn towards communism around 1938. I used to assist communist leaders with carrying out various activities. But I became a member of the party in 1940 when all my close and respected associates and friends got arrested in my presence. I felt a revulsion towards British rule and atrocities. From that day I considered myself to be one of the member of the Party started working accordingly. There was no need for applying for membership. Who would have accepted my application when everyone was behind bars?

Bhagabati babu, one of the imprisoned party members, sent a letter to me through a trusted Muslim warder. In it he cautioned me to be very careful so as not to be caught by the police. This warning was meant not only for me but for all those cadres whom the police was looking for. But how could I, a six-footer, hide myself?

A defence committee was formed to help and assist those implicated in the communist conspiracy case. Harekrushna Mahtab, a member of the Congress Working Committee, became its chairman. The lawyers who had come forward to fight the case were Rajkishore Das, Dinabandhu Sahu and Chandra Kanta Ghosh. Raju babu was Ananta Pattnaik and Guru Charan Pattanaik's uncle, Dinabandhu babu was Bhagabati babu's classmate and Chandra Kanta Ghosh was the brother of the famous revolutionary Rabi Ghosh. Earlier, Raju babu and Dinabandhu babu had been extremely helpful in fighting another case relating to the students' agitation. Again, this time, too, they came forward to help without accepting any fees; rather, they spent money from their own pockets.

The trial first took place in Cuttack Collectorate. Harbans Lal, an I.C.S. officer, was appointed the Special Magistrate. People used to throng the court to see the communist prisoners. Manabodha Panda, D.S.P. and Gangadhar Dwivedy, Inspector, were in charge of the case. Afterwards, Banchanidhi Mahapatra was appointed by the government to fight as government pleader. The government decided to try the case in a cell of the prison. The government's reasons for taking such a step were as follows: first, the communists would not be able to gain any political mileage, and second, they would be deprived of getting any legal assistance from lawyers. It was difficult for advocates to leave their daily work at the high court and go to the prison-cell to defend their clients. Moreover, Lal the Special Magistrate was very rude and dismissive. He did not possess qualities expected of a judge. He was inclined to support the government without any scruples. An impartial and objective judgment was therefore not to be expected from him. Hence, as per the advice and suggestions of local advocates, it was decided that the case should be entrusted to a barrister from Calcutta, who would be assisted by local lawyers. The communists' friends in Calcutta helped them by sending a barrister to Cuttack to take up the case without demanding any fees. He was taller then the Government lawyer and the magistrate by about three inches. He spoke English with a British accent. He was always ready and prepared to prove his mettle through his knowledge and intelligence and was adept at dealing with the unpleasant behavior and unreasonable orders of the magistrate. He stayed at the district dak bungalow in front of the East Hostel of Ravenshaw College. (The bunglow has been demolished and a market complex has come up in its place.) After appearing at the trial he used to spend his time among friends sipping tea. Ramakrushna Pati, Chandra Kanta Ghosh, Rama Chandra Mishra, a few others and myself used to join in. When and how he outwitted the Magistrate and embarrassed the government lawyer or how he broke through the defences of the government witnesses were the topic of our discussion.

Altogether, forty-nine witnesses were brought to the court during the trial. How secret documents were brought to Cuttack from Bombay in the name of renowned dentist George Pattanaik, and the owner of a flour mill though Sagar Soap Factory were all discussed in detail.

How and where Bhagabati, Baidyanath and Guru Charan, etc. used to meet secretly was also described. Many people holding government jobs gave false evidence to save their jobs. After six months, the magistrate pronounced his verdict. Bhagabati Panigrahi, Baidyanath Rath, Gurucharan Pattnaik were sentenced to one year and a half's rigorous imprisonment, Ananta Patanaik and Banchanidhi Das to nine months' and Sarat Patnaik and Bijay Chandra Das to three months' respectively. Durga Charan Mohanty was acquitted due to want of evidence. Sarat Patanaik and Bijaya Chandra Das were sentenced to nine months' imprisonment for having raised slogans against the government at the time of being transferred from the Cuttack to Angul jail.

Bhagabati babu's assistance was needed after the prisoners were transferred to Angul. Ram Krushna Pati, Ram Mishra and I decided to meet Bhagabati babu. I was asked to go to Angul and visit Bhagabati babu pretending to be his nephew. And, if possible, to talk to him about the matter. I would not carry any letters or papers because we suspected that I might be searched on the way or at the entrance of the jail.

I took the train to Meramundali in Febuary 1940, and from there I was to go to Angul by bus. After getting into an inter-class compartment at Cuttack station I discovered that the lone passenger sitting in the compartment was Bata Krushna Mohanty, who was very well known to me. He was a police officer. We called him 'Bata bhai'. He hailed from a place near our village and happened to be my father's student. On hearing of my plans to visit to Angul, he said there was no suitable accommodation available in Angul. I had not got a room booked in the dak bunglow. Where should I stay? He suggested that, if I did not have any objection, I could stay with him. I didn't have any secret documents with me. I said that, I would not mind if my staying with him would not put his job at risk. It was 12 noon when we arrived at Angul. I stayed with Bata bhai in his house, which lay within the premises of the jail. He made no enquires about the purpose of my visit. There was a row of thatched houses each having three rooms. He lived in one room and a Muslim police officer in another. They lived alone and cooked their meals together.

I went to the jail in the afternoon. My application was granted after waiting for about half an hour. I met Bhagabati babu in the office

of the jail. The jailer was a perfect gentleman. He had never heard of me earlier. The moment we started discussing family matters, he turned his face away and busied himself with office work. There was now no problem about discussing the matter which I had gone to talk to Bhagabati babu about. After some time, Baidyanath Rath reached there under some pretext and slipped a letter in to my hand. This was to be passed on to his wife, who lived in village Kalarahanga. Our other comrades talked to me standing on the other side of the office window. I came to know from them that Ananta Pattnaik was busy writing poems; Baidyanath Rath was learning how to rhyme lines in poems. Bhagabati babu had started writing a book on world history and had filled two notebooks. This book, however, could not be published. After his death in 1943, someone stole these and these were never found. This left a gap gap in the history of Oriya literature never to be filled. I came out after spending an hour and a half in the jail. I heard from the inmates that the jailer was related to the painter Gopal Kanungo and treated the inmates very well within the limits of the rules of law.

Bata bhai arranged a good dinner at night. We sat down to eat, the three of us, at a table: Bata bhai, a colleague of his whose name I do not remember and I. While dining, Batabhai's colleague said that information regarding a communist had been received from Cuttack. He had searched everywhere but without any success. Bata bhai laughed aloud and said, " He is sitting right in front of you." The gentleman was stupefied. Later, I knew that he was an A.S.I. of the special branch. The next morning I left Angul.

*Bhuli Nahin*. Cuttack: Alka Prakashani, 1994

# Joining a Secret Society

**Banka Behary Das**

Translated by Anil Kumar Pradhan

## I

AFTER the August revolution began, Surendra Nath Dwivedi and Malati Choudhuri escaped arrest by going underground and came to Orissa. On the way, Dwivedi sent me a post card in which he wrote about Gandhiji's last message "Do or die". Nothing was mentioned in the letter about the role I should now play. I received the letter on 11th or 13th August. At that time, letters of important leaders were scrutinized by Intelligence people, but I was not a well-known student leader then, even though I was participating in politics. That is why that letter did not draw the attention of the scrutinizing officer. Although the letter reached us, we were unsure about what was expected of us. Nobody was there to advise us, so I decided to take part in the agitational activities.

Closing down the college would have proved extremely difficult. In this work, Sri Pradipta Kishore Das along with some other people took the leadership. I was one of their associates. I was a classmate of Sri Pradipta Das from Class VIII at Ravenshaw Collegiate school. Pradipta Babu stayed in the hostel and I stayed in the Manika Ghose Bazar Mess. Much later, Pradipta babu completed his higher studies and became President of the Orissa Students' Congress. Afterwards, he left Congress and joined the Socialist Party with us. As a member of the Orissa Legislative Assembly, he won name and fame. In 1977, he became the education minister in the government led by the Janata Party.

One day it was decided to gherao the college and to force all the teachers, including the Principal, to resign. This message was spread among all the students, and everybody was willing to take part in the gherao. However, the hidden plan was that when hundreds of students entered the college, the telephone line would

be cut so that the Principal would not be able to inform the police. When a group of students requested the principal not to work as a slave of the British government, another group of students burnt the office stationeries and papers. In this way, our plan was carried out and the students disappeared when the police came. At that time, Professor Prana Krushna Parija, a great son of Orissa, was the Principal of Ravenshaw College. After this incident, he closed the college sine die. This was what we had wanted to happen. It would have been impossible to close the college through an appeal. Only through students' agitation could this goal be achieved. After this incident, Pradipta Babu and Surendra Mohanty (after he completed his college education he joined the AIR as a high-ranking officer, and later in life was highly acclaimed as a dramatist. Unfortunately he died relatively young) left Cuttack. They could thus escape arrest.

This incident took place in the middle of August. At that time Surendra Nath Dwivedi was in hiding in Cuttack and was masterminding an organized movement. He maintained contact with Congressmen, students and youngmen like us who were known to him. In this secret organisation I too played a role.

At that time there was a people's movement in all parts of Orissa. The main task of our group was to organize, and give direction to, this spontaneous movement. Sri Dwibedi was taking the leadership, and we did liasion work.

I had never consciously planned to enter the world of politics. The August Revolution changed the course of my life. What happened to me was also the experience of many others. The 1921 movement, the 1931-33 movement and the August revolution in 1942 were turning points in the lives of many Indians. When such big waves come, lives are transformed. Many people found that this wave swept away their earlier ambitions.

If I had not joined the August revolution, who knows what I would have become. My parents and my family members wanted me to be a high-ranking officer. Generally family members entertain high expectation of good students. Nevertheless, I had had a liking for politics at an intellectual level since my childhood. Therefore, I had no desire to become an officer or to get into any lucrative government service. I thought that, if I could get a chance to to study in Patna for

higher studeies, I would complete my master's degree in economics and become a lecturer in a college. I think I was fond of reading and intellectual discourse, and that is why I was thinking like that.

## II

Life took a different turn when I joined the secret society formed by Surendra Nath Dwivedi. My job was to collect messages sent by other organisations, deliver them to Dwivedi and carry his messages back to them. A few other friends were also engaged in establishing a link with the outside world. I came to know them and later, in course of my political life, I became intimate with them. They included Biswanath Pandit, Anil Kumar Ghosh, Sachidananda Mishra, Nishamani Khuntia and a few others. Each of us was entrusted with specific responsibilities and we never shared the secrets among ourselves. Nor did we try to do so. Dwivedi alone knew everything and gave instructions to each of us. We were already aware that there was a strict sense of discipline among the members working for a secret society. The purpose was: the government machinery would not be in a position of catching all of us in the event of one getting caught or leaking a secret out of fear.

Occasionally, cyclostyled bulletins were circulated among the people of Orissa in order to maintain Orissa's link with the movement and keep people informed about it. The important incidents, which took place at different places in and outside Orissa but were censored by the Government, were published in the bulletins. Besides, people taking part in the movement were given general instructions through these bulletins.

Dwivedi himself wrote out the contents of the bulletins. Banamali Mishra, the main worker of Rastrabhasa Prachar Samity, who wrote a good hand, prepared the copy, which was then cyclostyled. The copies were distributed in Cuttack and sent to other places for circulation. Since the bulletin was not printed in a press, it was not possible to bring out a large number of copies. They were dropped at selected houses. This strategy worked and the news spread in the area the next day.

A story under the heading 'Arrest Musaib Khan', carrying news of the police firing at Kaipada in Cuttack district, in which seven

persons were killed, was published in one of the issues. Musaib Khan was the S.D.O. of Jajpur, who had ordered the firing. The bulletin frightened the officialdom. All possible efforts were made to arrest Surendra Nath Dwivedi. It was announced that anyone giving any clue leading to his arrest would be rewarded.

Dwivedi went underground. Nandi Sahu had a few houses in different lanes in Chandnichowk area. His son, Mathurananda Sahu helped Dwivedi by hiding him in his different houses. I used to visit him regularly and deliver messages to him. I also helped him in preparing the leaflets.

Swami Bichitrananda Das had established links with Dwivedi although he did not come out into the open. He was an established lawyer and a staunch Congressman. N.R. Swamy, a veteran journalist and Manager of Rastrabhasa Prachar Samity, helped Dwivedi in many ways. They were intimate friends. Many others extended financial and other kinds of help.

A couple of leaders from every district were associated with the secret society. Chief among them were Goura Chandra Das of Balasore, Ghanashyam Patnaik of Ganjam and Bhairab Charan Mohanty of Sambalpur. Bhairab babu had resigned his job in the Orissa Secretariat and joined the movement. The Secretariat had been temporaily shifted from Cuttack to Sambalpur in order to escape a possible bomb attack during the war. So Bhairab babu was staying there. Later, all of them got arrested. Dwivedi, all others and myself were tried in criminal cases and sent to jail.

For about two months since the 8th of August 1942, the movement continued vigorously all over Orissa. The Congress organisation was strong in Koraput and the movement took a violent turn there. The police resorted to firing to suppress the movement. A government official died. Lakshman Naik and a few others were charged with murder. Naik was hanged in Berhampur jail. He embraced death amid the chanting of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai.'

In order to suppress the movement, the police resorted to firing at many places in undivided Balasore district, where the maximum number of people courted martyrdom. Many fell to the bullets at Eram in Basudevpur, Lunia and Katasahi in Dhamnagar and Tudigadia in Khaira. People in those places had established popular governments and the police resorted to firing to suppress them. The incident at

Eram is written in golden letters in the history of freedom struggle in India. Likewise, the firing at Kaipara is worth mentioning. Everywhere police stations were gheraoed, government offices were paralysed and non-cooperation with the government continued.

The issues of the bulletin brought out by our secret society carried news on all these developments and kept the people informed about the movement. Sabotaging railway tracks, disconnecting telephone and telegraph wires and thereby disrupting the communication network of the government were daily occurrences. By that time, most schools and colleges were closed sine die and many students and young men took leading part in the movement.

British Government got the information that the secret society under the leadership of Dwivedi was spearheading the movement. It concentrated its efforts on arresting the members of the society. Actually, all freedom-loving persons took it upon themselves to carry out such activities. The secret society only served as a link between individuals and organisations. Large-scale arrest of the Congress leaders, police oppression and Gandhiji's call for the final struggle were at the root of the movement.

I used to write addresses on the backs of envelopes containing Dwivedi's letters and post them in different post offices in Cuttack city. If Dwivedi wrote the addresses, police might grow suspicious about the letters since they were thoroughly acquainted with his handwriting. Occasionally, a little money was to be sent to a few persons, who were arrested or had gone underground. I used to fill in the money order forms. Once I sent twenty rupees by M.O. to the family of Adikanda Das of Dhenkanal. I signed the form and wrote my Kalyanpur address in the sender's box. The police now got a clue. The handwriting matched with the handwriting on the back of several envelopes seized earlier. Adikanda was injured in police firing at Dhenkanal and we had made arrangements for his treatment. Since he was not financially well off, the money order had been sent. The police could track me down for this act of foolishness. I was arrested. The police now were confident; they would now be able to catch Dwivedi and others.

*Sangramara Sesha Nahin,* Bhubaneswar: Ramesh Chandra Swain, 1998

# A Moment of Decision

**Chittaranjan Das**
Translated by Jatindra Kumar Nayak

AS the year 1942 approached, the political atmosphere in India became charged. In the battlefields of Asia, the British government suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of the Japanese army. Japanese war planes occasionally bombed the eastern part of India. Once the Japanese bombed and sank a few Allies warships off the Orissa coast. The wounded soldiers were brought over to Cuttack. There were plans to put them up in the hostels of Ravenshaw College and we were asked to vacate our rooms immediately. The final battle for independence seemed imminent.

When I came back to the college hostel after the summer holidays, I was allotted a single room upstairs for I had done well in the first-year degree examination. On the 9th of August, Mahatma Gandhi called upon the British to quit India. The Government arrested Gandhi and all other leaders in the country. For a couple of days after this, I was too restless to concentrate on anything. I shut myself up in my room. It was as if the moment had arrived to take a crucial decision not only for the whole country but also for myself.

I did not attend classes during this period. One morning, I walked all the way to my brother's residence in Bamphi Sahi. I confessed to him that my heart was no longer in my studies and that I wanted to join the freedom struggle. I was apprehensive that, on hearing this, he would scold me. Since my childhood he had pinned very high hopes on me, and was extremely fond of me. He used to tell everyone that, when I grew older, I would become an ICS officer. Was not I dashing all his fondest dreams? But, most unexpectedly, he toughened my sagging resolve. He said to me, "Even I feel like giving up my government job and throwing myself into Gandhi's movement at a time like this. But I have so many family responsibilities to shoulder, which cannot be overlooked. But your case is different. If you really

want to take part in the struggle, do so by all means. However, I must say that you should not give in to a momentary impulse and go to jail. When the excitement of the moment has passed, you would regret your mistake. Maybe, you would go so far as to want to apologise to the government in order to get out of the jail. This will be a terrible thing to happen and, for the rest of your life, you will feel guilty." He advised me to go to our village. Some agitational activities would be undertaken there under Gouribhai's leadership, and I would be able to take part in these. Participation in the struggle would give me a chance to find out if I had chosen the right path. I could stay with the movement and go to jail, if I felt like it. Alternatively, I could withdraw from the struggle and resume my studies. He said all this very calmly.

His words made me happy, and I came back to the hostel. A lot of confusion within had been dispelled and I was now ready to arrive at a decision. It had seemed as if someone's blessings had burnt away a lot of my doubts and made me feel much lighter. By this time, the August revolution had set the country on fire, as it were. The big leaders of the Congress party in Orissa had all been sent to jail. Our college had been placed under strict police surveillance in order to prevent anyone from instigating the students. The superintendents of our hostel behaved as if they wholeheartedly supported the government's activities. They were not so much opposed to the August Revolution, as they were scared of losing their jobs. At night I said nothing about my decision to any of my friends in the hostel. I got up early in the morning, took my bath and hung my wet lungi to dry on the door and set off. At least for a day or two no one would suspect that I was absent. The lungi drying on the door would keep people from finding out if there was someone inside. I took care not to lock the door.

I came to the canal embankment, which lay on the southern side of the college, and walked along it towards Nuabazar. From there, people travelled to Jagatsinghpur by boats pulled by hand. For going to my village, I had to travel in one of these up to Balia. The fare was four annas. The boat would leave Nuabazar at about nine or ten in the morning and reach Balia around four in the afternoon. On the way, one sometimes changed boats at Kaijanga. My village Bagalpur was at a distance of two kilometers from Balia. It was getting dark by

the time I reached home. I explained to my family members that I had come home because the college had been closed on account of the nationalist agitation. Of course, that was the case. On being asked if I had informed my elder brother, I said that I had done so. Gouribhai was away from the village at the time. Two days later, he came from Cuttack, travelling by foot along a winding path. He was accompanied by Gobind Chandra Mohanty, who belonged to Satpura, a neighbouring village. Gouribhai's right hand was deformed from birth. He was popularly known as khandi Gourang Das. There was always the danger of being caught, so they travelled only at night, and during day time hid themselves in someone's house.

When they arrived in the village I went to them to enquire about the future course of the struggle. They told us that at the Congress Convention Gandhi's message was 'do or die'. Every Indian should act according to the dictates of his own conscience and fight British rule. Many leaders in Orissa and the rest of the country had been imprisoned. Many had gone underground. The latter would now carry on the struggle. Sri Surendra Nath Dwivedi was hiding in Cuttack. He would be the link between Orissa and the world outside, and all of us would get united and act as a single group. As a result of restrictions imposed by the government, newspapers would not carry news about what was happening all over the country, which was in the grip of the August Revolution. Therefore, news had to flow from one province to the other through informal channels. All of us should remain in touch with Dwivedi living in Cuttack, and Bagalpur would function as the centre for all villages nearby. News and directions would be sent from Cuttack. Pamphlets carrying these would be printed in Bagalpur, which would then be distributed through a network operating with extreme secrecy.

I was entrusted with the task of getting the pamphlets printed. There was a litho machine in the village minor school, which was chiefly used to print question papers. We talked to the headmaster of this school and it was decided that we would use this machine. Stencil sheets, paper, and printer's ink would be sent from Cuttack by Dwibedi through someone. Precautions would be taken to ensure that nobody knew that pamphlets were being printed at the school. Not even the students or the hostel boarders should get an inkling of this. So, all

the work had to be done at night. Every night after dinner I would come to the school, carrying a hurricane lamp. It was the month of August. The village path was deep in mud in places. As I had to plod through sticky mud, I carried a bamboo staff. By the time I would reach the school, most of the boarders would be asleep or would be going to bed. The headmaster would be waiting for me in the office room. He would hand me the key and go home. I would set to work after this. A messenger would bring news from Cuttack. I would add to this some of my own writings. Now and then I would write a fiery poem calling upon people to fight the British. It would be midnight before the day's work was done. Everything was done in such secrecy that even the teachers could suspect nothing.

The village chowkidar, Keshab, came to the school verandah after making a few rounds at night and slept there. The moment he arrived, I would stop all work, close the door behind me, come out and spend five to ten minutes exchanging gossip with him. He would tell me what was going on at the police station. Those days, the police station was in Gobindpur, which stood on the bank of the river Debi. Keshab thought that I was working at my studies or writing something in the office room. He would tell me, "Baboo, do your work. Don't let anything scare you. I am sleeping on the verandah". The very thought that I was writing and printing pamphlets with the aim of driving the British out of India, while their agent slept on the verandah outside, struck me as extremely funny. After my work for the night was finished, I would carefully burn the ink-stained stencil paper. I would clean the machine and neatly sort out the papers. Having done this, I would go to sleep. My younger brother, Deba, was a student of class seven at this school at the time. He was staying in the hostel. He would leave some space on his rush-mat for me to sleep on. I would lie down beside him and get up before other children left their beds. I would finish my ablutions by the river, take my bath, come back to the school and return the keys to the headmaster. Then I would go back home, carrying the hurricane lamp and the bamboo staff. My younger brother was under the impression that I did some work at night and went to sleep beside him after it was over. Beyond this he knew nothing. Besides, he was too young to go deeper into the matter.

*Mitrasya Chakshusa* Cuttack: S.B. Publications, 1998

## The Dawn of Independence

**Rabi Ray**

Translated by Jatindra K Nayak

WHILE studying at Ravenshaw college, we did something which was unprecedented and deserved to be recorded in the annals of freedom struggle in Orissa in letters of gold. The incident took place in 1946/47 around this time, the annual sports of the college were being held. This function had become so popular that people from far off places used to come to the college to watch it. At that time S. Ray was principal, Ravenshaw college. Uin the playground union jack had been hoisted. Some student leaders decided to bring the union jack down and hoist the tricolor inits place. This was done. At the time the falg of the Indian national Congress was also the national flag. I was a student of history honours. The principal S. Ray taught us political history, so he knew us very well. Getting to know that a plan to rusticate students involved in this incident was afoot, we formed a student action committee. This committee passed two resolutions. In one of these the students who had hoisted the national flag in the college were felicitated. And the authorities were warned that the consequences of rusticating them would be serious. In the second resolution it was demanded that in all educational institutions in Orissa-from primary schools to universities, the national flag be hoisted in place of the union jack. The British were still ruling India. Lord Mountbatten was the Viceroy and Ackinleck was the Commander-in-Chief. Srijukta Harekrushna Mahtab was the Premier of Orissa (Those days, the Chief Minister was called Premier). I may mention here that Ackinleck had been invited to deliver the convocation address at Utkal University.

However, in the face of stiff opposition from students, he decided against visiting Orissa.

Agitation was now launched pressing the demands mentioned earlier. Pradipta Kishore Das headed the action committee. The

committee sent an ultimatum saying that we would take over West Hostel of Ravenshaw College and keep it under our control until these two demands had been met.

An innovative experiment was made: the agitation would be given a revolutionary turn but it would be totally non violent in character. We ' captured' West Hostel and kept the superintendent respectfully confined inside a 'jail' specially made inside the hostel. At the time our superintendent was famous philosophy teacher, Sri Srinivas Sahoo. He later became vice chancellor of a university. I remember that we went to see him in jail and asked him, "Sir, how are you getting on?" He replied, smiling, "I am absolutely comfortable." We declared West Hostel an independent republic. The principal S. Ray sought our 'permission' to go into the hostel. But the action committee refused 'permission' to him. He knew me personally. So he said, "Rabi, can I go in?" I said, "No. You can't. We have great respect for you. But not to let anyone in is a decision we have taken unanimously. I am helpless."

At the time Janaki Ballav Pattnaik (He became Chief Minister, Orissa later.) was a boarder of West Hostel. He had earned the reputation of being a brilliant student of Sanskrit. We chose him to lead us.

The procession we had taken out in support of students' demands was an unprecedented event for the residents of Cuttack city. I have never seen a student procession like that ever. Girls led it from the front. I still remember the names of two of them: Nirupama Rath and Jogamamya Pattnaik. (Both of them became doctors later.). Shyamali Lahiri (She married Kulamani Mohapatra later) was also in the vanguard of the procession. The procession started from Ravenshaw College and, passing through Buxi Bazar, reached Gouri Sankar park. Ramanathn was District magistrate, Cuttack at the time. People extended such spontaneous and enthusiastic support to us that they had brought in water and maunds of puffed rice for us from Balu Bazar to the site of Public meeting. The magnitude of public support for us led Raninathan to lift the 144 Act, which he had imposed earlier. When Seargent Markand Routroy came forward to arrest Shyamali Lahiri, I told him," You can't even touch her unless you bring women constables. Then they arrested me instead of Shyamali. On that day, I

got arrested for the first time in my life. I can never ever forget this day. When we got arrested announced that we would come out of jail only after the government accepted the demands of students. Sri Harihar Mohapatra, who became a justice later, had taken it upon himself to mediate between the government and students. At last, our demands were fulfilled. We got out of jail, held a meeting in the field in front of the town hall and marched back to the college like conquering heroes. This was the first time the national flag was hoisted in the educational institution of a province during British rule. The incident created quite a sensation in the country.

*Anweshara Akash*, Bhubaneswar : Lohia Akademi Trust, 2005

# A Memorable Day

**Manoranjan Das**
Translated by Arun Kumar Mohanty
Jatindra Kumar Nayak

THE 14th of July is a memorable day in world history. Inspired by the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, on that day in 1789, the people of France had started the French Revolution. They had attacked the prison, Fort Bastille situated on the outskirts of Paris. The pent-up anger of the people had turned them wild. Likewise, people in 1942 burnt down the office of Ravenshaw College. Students in groups indulged in acts of destruction. They entered the office, smashed chairs, tables and destroyed ceiling fans. They threw away the files. It was difficult to say who was doing what. I was a part of the mob the mob. Someone was trying to disconnect the telephone in the office room of the Principal. He was unable to do it alone. Although he did not seek my help, I rushed to lend him a hand. Both of us beat the wire till it snapped. After that I entered the room. Quite a few students were busy tearing the papers and scattering the files. I stood a little away from the Head Clerk, Jagannath Mishra's table. Suddenly, I noticed a fire on the table of Sadhu babu. Someone had brought petrol in a tin and set the files on fire. Fire spread through the office. The entire office was filled with smoke. Students rushed out of the office to safety. The excitement, the heat and the smoke made me breathless. I breathed freely after I came out. It seemed as if everything had happened in a split second. I came to know that Bijay Ketan Mangaraj, the son of the leader, Jadumani Mangaraj, was among the students who had set the office on fire. Later, Bijoy became my colleague in All India Radio. His commentaries on the radio during the days when the Mukti Vahini was fighting the Pakistan army thrilled everyone. His commentary was really exciting. No other programme, apart from Suren Mohanty's weekly boadcast, 'Nakahile Bhala', had enjoyed so much success.

It was difficult to find out who took part in the incident of burning the college office. It was not possible that everything could be recorded in history. Student leaders who were sent to prison during and after the August Movement included Banamali Patanaik, Biren Mitra, Surajmal Shah, Bibhudhendra Mishra, Amitabh Mohapatra and a few others.

Gourishyam Nayak, the local leader of Ersama, took the leadership in attacking the police station at Ersama during the movement. Probably, Ersama formed a part of the Kujang zamindari those days. Nayak was well known to my father. The news of his arrest led to a lot of discussion. Although I wrote a part of the play, *August Na* in 1942, I rewrote it in early part of 1947. The incident of raid and burning of Ersama police station kept recurring in my mind when I wrote the play. This is how it shaped the play's ending :

The protagonist of the play, Amar, was sentenced to death in what amounted to a show-trial. When he was lodged in the condemned cell, his friend Biswanath came to see him for the last time.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Amar | : | Biswanath ! |
| Biswanath | : | I've been allowed only two minutes. |
| Amar | : | You ? |
| Biswanath | : | I have been released. |
| Amar | : | What are you doing now ? |
| Biswanath | : | Staying at home, doing nothing. What shall I do? I can't take a decision. |
| Amar | | Aren't you ashmaed of yourself, Biswananath ? You say you can't take a decision. Have the foreign rulers left the country ? |
| Biswanath | | I'm sorry, Amar. I shall set to work from tomorrow. Do you have any information on Jayant and Baruni ? |
| Amar | | Yes. They have been sent to the Andamans. |
| Biswanath | | Amar ! |
| Amar | | And there is another information for you. |
| Biswanath | | What ? |
| Amar | | I'll be hanged before sunrise tomorrow. |
| Biswanath | | To be hanged ! |
| Amar | | Lakshman Naik, myself, and... |

| | |
|---|---|
| Biswanath | And ? |
| Amar | My father. |
| Biswanath | Amar ! |
| Amar | Yes, Biswanath, I couldn't imagine the rustic farmer could abandon his rice-fields and take the plunge. |
| Biswanath | Did he organise the raid on the Police Station No.7 ? |
| Amar | Yes. |
| Biswanath | Probably because you joined the movement... |
| Amar | Not at all. He himself felt that one should live like a man, fighting for freedom and dignity. |
| Biswanath | Amar, I salute you on behalf all my countrymen. |

The August Movement was not confined only to students. It was the greatest mass movement which swept the country. Like several instruments forming an orchestra, students, teachers, intellectuals, farmers, workers and, above all, the public got united. Amar's father, a poor peasant, thus served as a symbol of this unity. At the background of the action of the play was the real incident of the burning down of the Ersama police station. I had actually witnessed the incidents as they took place. And my play was based on those real experiences.

The burning of the college office took place in 1942. Police oppression followed. The college was closed down; students' messes were closed down. I left Cuttack for Kujang, bag and baggage, taking a Cheverlot bus belonging to Mani Bose's Cuttack Motor Association.

*Smruti Sanlap.* Cuttack : Friends' Publishers, 1999

## Contributors

**Nilakantha Das** (1884-1969), a renowned scholar, educationist and political leader, who was also the Speaker of Orissa Legislative Assembly. From 1957 to 1961. The extract is from his autobiography **Atmajibani** published by Cuttack Students' Store (new ed.1986).

**Godabarish Mishra** (1886-1956) was an eminent poet, educationist and a distinguished political leader. His autobiography **Ardha Satabdira Odisha o Tahnire Mo Sthana** was published by Grantha Mandir, Cuttack in 1958.

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Translators: A.J. Khan and Zehara Jabeen

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Editor: Mary Mohanty

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Translator: Supriya Kar

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# FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM

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